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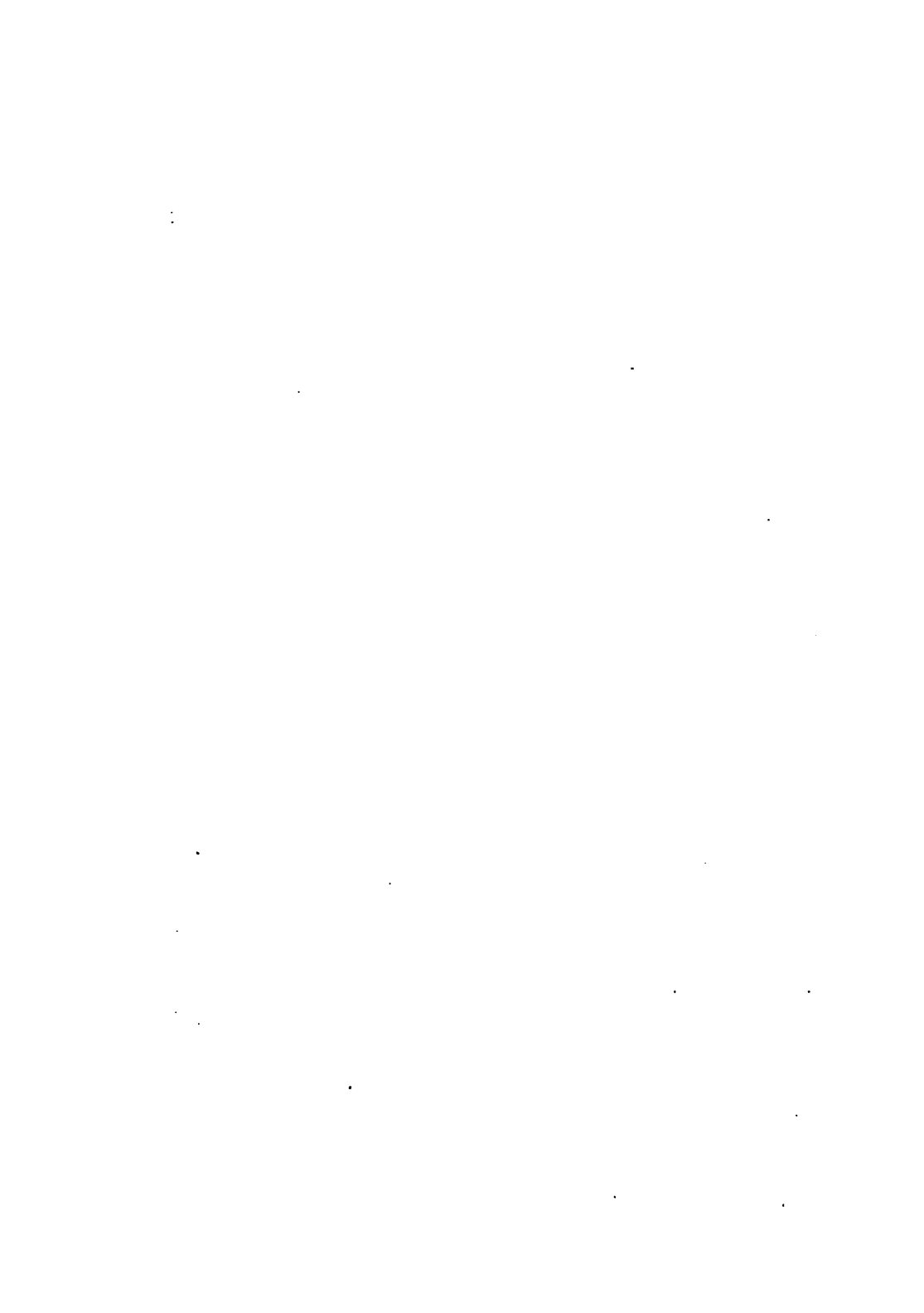
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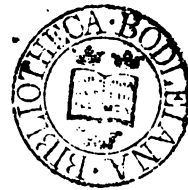


A TRUE REFORMER

A
TRUE REFORMER

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.



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A TRUE REFORMER.

CHAPTER XLIX.

UNINTERESTING BUT NECESSARY.

“REORGANISATION of the Indian army!” exclaimed Strickland, leaning back in his chair and passing his hand through his hair in a bewildered manner; that is going into reform with a vengeance. I should have thought the British army would have been enough to satisfy the most ardent reformer, at any rate to begin with. However, pray go on; I am all attention.”

“It cannot be helped. It is no good putting matters square at home, and trying to make military rank worth having, when titles are swamped by the prodigal misuse of them in India. It makes one lose all patience to think about it—the needlessness and the heedlessness with which they have gone out of their way there to prostitute military rank by that preposterous Staff Corps.”

"I have no doubt the system is a very bad one, because I observe everybody abuses it ; but I never succeeded in making out what it is all about. The Indian army is a sort of thing no fellow can understand."

"I should think not. The fatuity of the whole arrangement is simply inconceivable. Yet it is rather monstrous than mysterious, and may be readily described. Know then that what is called the Indian Civil Service—that is, the service chosen by competition—is really only a part of the Civil Service of India. Besides this body, the magistrates, judges, and so forth, who govern the country, there is another body of officials almost equally numerous, also acting as magistrates and judges, and in every conceivable civil situation, who are chosen from the army. But instead of being required to leave the army on entering the Civil Service, they are transferred to what is called the Indian Staff Corps—*lucus a non lucendo*—which is not a corps, and has no connection whatever with the Staff. This body has no distinct organisation, nor any specific size, but is simply a congeries of miscellaneous Government employees, the only thing military about it being its name ; but the officials who, in virtue of being judges and magistrates, or road-makers, or accountants, or policemen, or doing any sort of civil work whatever, are entitled to become members of this body, henceforward receive military promotion at certain stated periods, rising to be captains in twelve years, majors

in twenty, lieutenant-colonels in twenty-six, colonels in thirty-one, and eventually, if they live long enough, general officers."

"And does their pay increase in the same order?"

"Not a bit of it. Their pay depends entirely on the nature of the appointment they hold. You may see one man a commissioner and colonel on five thousand a-year, and another 'brother officer' of the same standing a junior police-officer or deputy canal superintendent getting only as many hundreds."

"This must be very awkward."

"Very awkward for the man who gets the hundreds."

"But how is their relative position determined when they come together on military duty?"

"They never do come together on military duty, or any other duty. They are not eligible to exercise any military functions whatever, or to take any military command, neither are they subject to the command of any one. If one of these so-called colonels lives in a military station, he is not under the orders of the officer commanding the troops; and if the command fell vacant, he could not exercise it. He is, in fact, a civilian in everything but in name."

"It seems inconceivable that such a system should have been hit upon."

"It does; and because it is so absurd, people believe there must be some hidden virtue in it. This cannot be the whole of the plan, they naturally say, because it is so absurd."

"But how is the real Indian army organised ? because I presume there is a real Indian army."

"There is an Indian Army of about a hundred and fifty regiments, which is officered from the Staff Corps also, seven officers to a regiment. They enter that corps through the British army in the first instance. A young fellow who wants to join the Indian army is appointed to a line regiment serving in India, and after a year or two gets transferred to a native regiment, in virtue of which he leaves the British army altogether, and is transferred to the Staff Corps, his promotion being henceforward regulated solely by length of service."

"Then a portion of these Staff Corps men are in fact employed as soldiers ?"

"Undoubtedly ; and this has no doubt served to disguise the anomaly which exists in regard to the civil part. Otherwise it must have been exposed before this time. But even for the military portion the organisation is singularly unsuitable ; because, since all regimental appointments in the Indian army are made by selection, the rank held by a man has very often no sort of relation to his military position. You may often see a captain commanding a regiment, and a lieutenant-colonel or major in some quite subordinate post, or very possibly in no appointment at all ; because, since there is no sort of correspondence between the number of officers in each rank and the number of appointments, there is usually a large

surplusage of field-officers for whom no suitable employment can be found. However, my concern is not with the Indian army, except so far as it affects our own. One object of reform should be to raise the higher military titles in public estimation by conferring them only for merit, and not merely for senility; and this cannot be done so long as the Staff Corps abuse continues.

“Look at Boughler, for example, whom we met in the street the other day, when coming out of the Union Jack. That old gentleman was a district magistrate in Magadha for about twenty years, and would never have got any higher if he had held on for another twenty, for civil preferment goes only by efficiency. His lot was cast in an out-of-the-way part, where he never saw a soldier from one year’s end to the other, passing his life in a dull round of taking affidavits, collecting rents, and settling petty squabbles between the peasantry. I don’t suppose he ever read a book, certainly never a military book; nor would he mount a horse to save his life. Of military science generally, of the changes that have come over warfare, he has no more notion than this poker. Yet this worthy old Indian Justice Shallow rises in the fulness of time to be a general, and comes home to live in Bayswater and be accepted as a representative type of the Indian officer.

“Take Pogfield, again. You never met him, probably; but he is a well-known man, and a very

different sort of fellow to poor old Boughler. He was in the Analytical Department all his life, a clever man enough, and well informed about everything except military matters, which he hated. A regular military philistine is Pogfield; sneering at improved drill, and examinations for promotion (no examinations for promotion in the Indian Staff Corps), and military service, and all things pertaining to the army proper; especially bitter he used to be about the Staff College, and declares the Quartermaster-General's Department has gone to the deuce, now that some of the members of it know how to survey. He, too, has never been seen on horseback, and he, too, is now a general officer. No wonder you Guardsmen sneer at Indian officers, when these slipshod old fellows are taken for specimens. Happily it has also some real soldiers to show, or the Indian army would be in ill case. Not, however, that the military portion of it is immaculate. It was altogether ahead of the British army in the ante-Crimean days; but I doubt if it has advanced with the age, or partaken of the scientific spirit which now actuates European armies. It tends to grow rusty, and some of it is little better than an armed police. People forget that a large part of the Indian service has not been engaged in serious war since the beginning of the century, and go on saying that India is a splendid practical military school. It may have been once, and the frontier may be so still; but I should

say that Southern and Western India form the worst possible school ; a handful of troops scattered in insignificant detachments, idling for six months in the year, and practising an antiquated drill with still more antiquated arms for the remainder. The fact is, the splendid use to which a few men in that country have turned their opportunities blinds the world to the faults of the rest."

"As to all which your secretary desires humbly to act as chorus. But will it not be adding to what is rather a tough job already, to go into Indian army reform too?"

"I think not. If Lord Stowe will take the matter up, it is not likely he will meet with much opposition ; nobody is interested in maintaining the existing system, and every one who knows anything about it agrees in condemning it. The difficulty has been to get some one to raise the question. I suppose there are not a dozen men outside the army, even at the India Office, who know what the Staff Corps means.

"You must," I continued, "of necessity deal with the two armies at the same time, otherwise these Staff Corps crudities will crop up at every point to embarrass the military reformer. Take one instance. Promotion to colonel in the British army is obtained only by qualifying service as lieutenant-colonel. A lieutenant-colonel in the Guards, for example, may remain a lieutenant-colonel for ever. To get promotion to colonel, he must serve for five years as a

mounted officer. And if you or I got a civil appointment while a regimental lieutenant-colonel, we should forfeit our claim to promotion in five years. But these restrictions are waived in the case of the Indian Staff Corps, the lieutenant-colonels of which all get their promotion to colonel in five years; judges and paymasters and accountants and all. Yet while such a row was made about the supersession of the British generals under the working of a quite fair rule, this particular form of wholesale supersession goes on continuously without notice or remonstrance. Truly we strain at gnats and swallow camels."

"Well, the Indian army being rolled up, is there anything else to be done?"

"There are one or two small matters still to be proposed; the abolition of honorary promotions on retirement; of honorary rank to the non-combatant grades; readjustment of relative rank, and generally the levelling up of the regimental officer, whom the tendency of modern changes has been to depress. The object should now be to make the captain a big man, and the captain's rank something worth having. But these points had better stand over for the present. I think we have given Lord Stowe enough matter to digest at one meal."

"Talking of meals, perhaps the Under-Secretary in his zeal is not aware that Mrs West has sent three times to say that luncheon is ready. I move an adjournment."

CHAPTER L.

OUR REFORMER TAKES LEAVE OF THE
OLD REGIMENT.

IT was an agreeable surprise at first to find that Lord Stowe, far from exhibiting opposition to the scheme set forth in my memorandum, expressed complete approval of it. After reading the paper through by the aid of his double eyeglass, while I watched his sagacious face eagerly for any evidence in the way of expression, he handed it back to me, and leaning back in his chair smacked his lips dryly, much as if he had taken a glass of wine and felt better in consequence. The scheme, he observed, seemed unexceptionable. Some of the parts would require working out a little more in detail, but it seemed quite clear, and he had nothing particular to suggest in addition. Nothing could surely, I thought at first, be more encouraging than such unqualified approval; and yet I could not help feeling an uneasy doubt whether a little opposition, or at any rate a little criticism, might not have been

more promising. If it had been a proposal to substitute blue-wove for cream-laid foolscap throughout the office, he could hardly have evinced less interest in the matter; and I wondered whether this extreme facility of temper, unusual even in Lord Stowe, could be the result of mere indifference, while my mind began to be divided between a foolish notion, either that he was perhaps acting under a private caution from the Premier, to the effect that the Under-Secretary, who, although nominally his subordinate, had to move the estimates and conduct army affairs in the Commons, was not to be interfered with in the play of his fine genius for administration; or else that my chief designed, like a crafty man of the world, to check my too officious zeal, throwing a judicious wet blanket over my attempt to set the office on fire, by affording the show without the substance of support. Few men take the measure of their own powers so impartially that they are not ready to attach some weight to the verdict of others, whether to be classed as blockheads or miracles of genius. So far, Lord Stowe's manner afforded no index for any self-classification; for while his praise was given in too mechanical fashion to carry much assurance, his voice and manner bore no trace of ironical meaning.

Still, no lever can act without a fulcrum, and my chief yielded at every point of application. As regards the mode of setting to work, for example,

Did he think we should begin with the organisation of the army? Yes, that would be no doubt the best subject to take up first. Or did he think it might not be better to begin by altering the form of the estimates? Lord Stowe thought that would perhaps be as good a way as any; adding, as I rose to go, that the scheme involved, of course, a good deal of work, and that it might be as well to consult the different heads of departments, and hear what they had to say.

But that Lord Stowe was perfectly guiltless of humour, this last remark must have been understood to be severely ironical; for inasmuch as it was not our way to alter anything, even to the pattern of a water-cask or a muster-roll, without obtaining every conceivable opinion that could bear on the subject, and possibly appointing one or more committees to report on it, the notion of reorganising the department or recasting the estimates without previous consultations was sufficiently absurd; but I accepted the remark as authority for placing my memorandum in the hands of Sir Mordaunt Burley, and for seeking opinions on the general subject from the various officials. These opinions were naturally somewhat various. Colonel Murphy, for example, highly approved of the proposal to place all stores under artillery officers, but thought that the measure most needed at present was to abolish the brigade system. Mr Bajherd, the Indexer-General, was more pro-

nounced in his sentiments. This gentleman certainly did not want for zeal: that quality was sufficiently indicated in his eager, anxious looks and excited manner of transacting business, as if the matter in hand were always of the last importance. But I was hardly prepared for his prompt reply, when, on his entering my room, flurried and careworn, to take orders about printing off a bundle of proofs, he said in reply to my question, that he certainly thought the department stood in need of thorough reform. Yes, Mr Bajherd went on to explain, things had come to a pass, when really, do what he could, he did not see his way to getting through the business properly. He referred to the indexing, and especially to the printing. Formerly no one but an under-secretary could order papers to be printed; but nowadays everybody in the office gave orders for the press, and it was printing here and printing there, till sometimes he hardly knew where he (Mr Bajherd) was, or where it would all end.

Then the "form work" was heavy—very heavy—especially since Sir Mordaunt Burley came into office. He did not wish for a moment to say anything disrespectful about so eminent a gentleman as Sir Mordaunt, and everybody must admit that he had really quite a remarkable ability for preparing forms; but he thought (speaking of course confidentially) that Sir Mordaunt was a little inconsiderate sometimes in ordering new forms before the old ones

were used up. Reams and reams of old forms there were in the cellars—"Sir Mordaunt's failures, we call them," said Mr Bajherd, smiling sadly, "of course confidentially"—printed, many of them, in two colours, and on the best hand-made "super-royal:" really beautiful forms, and now no better than waste-paper. It would be a great thing if something could yet be done to utilise them; and if he (Mr Bajherd) might venture on a suggestion, perhaps they might be served out to the army to use the reverse sides for correspondence. No, he thanked me, he had no further suggestions to offer; but he was very pleased to have had the opportunity of unburdening his mind on a subject which caused him constant anxiety.

Mr Rueteen the chief clerk was more of an optimist. The fact was, that gentleman said, all this cry for reform, and the complaints made by the army about our department, arose from a very simple cause. The army wanted things done in one way, and the department wanted to do them in another. The army, in short, did not understand the department. But when the army came to understand the department, and did things as the department wanted them to be done, then all this trouble and difficulty would disappear, and both the army and the department would work as smoothly as possible.

More important were the opinions of Sir Mordaunt Burley and the other heads of departments, to be de-

livered at a board meeting held for the purpose, the proceedings at which began by Sir Mordaunt Burley reading a paper which he had prepared by way of commentary on my memorandum. And here again a surprise awaited me, for Burley's essay, which occupied two hours in delivery, opened in terms of general approval of my plan. This would be indeed a testimony to the power of genius, that even Burley should be won over to my views. But then, could it be that he was in league with Lord Stowe, and that this was part of a concerted scheme to retire before the enemy, laying waste the country as he retreated? I inclined to the first idea, as Burley opened his case by explaining that if there was one idea which he had always cherished more than another, it was a thorough and well-considered scheme of decentralisation. A flattering testimony, I thought, is this sudden conversion to the persuasive force of genius. But when, under guise of offering some suggestions for giving effect to the scheme, Burley went on to overlay the subject with a cloud of words of which the drift soon became unintelligible, I began to doubt whether the confusion thus imported into the matter was not intentional, and my friend playing the part of a departmental cuttlefish. Only two things could be made out in this verbal fog. Burley's notion of decentralisation appeared to consist in distributing the army by districts, to each of which should be attached a deputy with a large staff of

clerks, reporting direct to himself, whereby, he said, that degree of general financial supervision could be exercised which must be contemplated under any system. As regards revision of the estimates, he thought a desirable preliminary would be to inquire into the forms of estimates used by other governments. A great advance had been made of late years in this respect, almost everywhere, and it would be proper to get the benefit of their experience. The Brazilian army estimates, he understood, were particularly good. He would therefore suggest the appointment of a special commission to travel about collecting information, and afterwards to draw up a report and forms, embodying the best points of the army estimates of each nation. This was the only definite proposal made in the memorandum, during the reading of which Lord Stowe looked patient, but infinitely bored.

Mr Aweditte, the Reviewer-General, when called on for his opinion, said that undoubtedly the Under-Secretary's proposed alterations in the forms of estimates and accounts *could* be effected, if on mature deliberation it was considered desirable to make the change; everything was possible in accounts. But he said this, raising his eyebrows and shrugging his shoulders as if to imply that others must take the consequences of any opening of floodgates, or rash tampering with existing systems; and it was plain Mr Aweditte had not parted with his suspicion re-

garding the Under-Secretary's subjection to lunatic paroxysms.

Mr Lougher Wrythem, who also was at the meeting, ventured, he said, to offer one remark bearing on the subject. As regards the strength of the army and the difficulty of recruiting, it might not have been generally observed that there was a close connection between the rate of recruiting and the price of cotton. He had made some calculations on the subject, which went to show that the price of cotton would probably rise about seven years hence to a point which would give such an increased impetus to recruiting as would admit of the first-class reserve being increased by 20,000 men. Further, with regard to the Under-Secretary's proposals for altering the mode of promotion to general officers, he had made a calculation which brought out the following interesting result—namely, that, in nine years from the present time, the average age of the lieutenant-colonels in the army would be $44\frac{1}{2}$ years; of the colonels, $50\frac{3}{4}$; and of the major-generals, $54\frac{1}{4}$ years. This calculation would be subject to slight modification according to the result of the new Towns Drainage Act, and if the general death-rate of the country should be favourably affected thereby. Still, the general result would be as stated, and it would be for consideration whether, in view of these interesting facts, it was necessary or even desirable to alter the

existing system, which he (Mr Wrythem) considered worked well on the whole.

The opinion of the Chief of the Staff, who was not at the meeting, but sent in a written memorandum, was less disguised. This appointment, now held by Sir Roderic Baton, had been created a few years ago, when the highest military office in the country became vacant through the ill health of its distinguished occupant, and the holder of it was placed in charge of the Personal or Military Branch of our establishment in Pall Mall. In this way, it was said, the sole responsibility of the Secretary of State for our military administration will be established beyond doubt or question ; the Chief of the Staff will act merely as his recognised agent, and the conflict of dual powers will be avoided. And truly if an army could be properly commanded by an elderly civilian who was shifted every two or three years, the benefit of the change might be admitted. And the experiment had in its way a fair chance of success, for Sir Roderic's claims to what was now the highest military post in the army were generally recognised on the score of character and services ; while the circumstance that he had formerly held a seat in the House of Commons was considered to be in his favour. And certainly, so far as establishing the undoubted supremacy of the Minister, the experiment had been completely successful ; although

whether the army knew distinctly by whom it was commanded was more doubtful. The Chief of the Staff is the military mouthpiece of the Minister, said the theorists ; see how we save red-tape and circumlocution by this plan : but how much was mouth-piece and how much Minister could never be precisely determined. Sir Roderic had a habit of going off to Baden-Baden to get rid of the gout whenever anything unpleasant was on hand, such as a reduction of field-officers, or a cutting down of commands, or the like ; returning in time to communicate the order to the army, which he could then do with a sort of moral shrug of the shoulders, as much as to say, you see I am not responsible for this ; this is the tinkering of the civil officials,—all done in my absence. But when anything good was coming off, in the way of extra brigadiers or extra allowances, for example, then it used to get freely rumoured in regimental circles that we had to thank our able and influential Chief of the Staff for the boon. He was the true soldier's friend, in fact.

I had avoided any personal discussion about my scheme with this high official, who, if diplomatic in action, was somewhat abrupt and choleric in manner, feeling that it might be distasteful to a full general, and one of the oldest officers in the army, to be put as it were on his defence by a mere captain, albeit a Parliamentary official ; and this caution proved to be not without reason. The Chief of the Staff (so ran

his memorandum) fully recognised the right of Captain West to propose any alterations he thought proper in the system of military organisation, and it was not within his (the Chief of the Staff's) province to discuss the various changes recommended in finance and account. Nor would he go into the large questions raised regarding recruiting and army reserves. But with respect to the very radical alterations proposed in the mode of appointment and promotion of general officers, this young officer had perhaps hardly considered the effect of his revolutionary scheme. Officers had been brought up to consider that they would never be superseded as generals; and further, that colonels are entitled to succeed to the rank of general in order of seniority. The inviolability of this rule had been uniformly recognised, as witness in proof the numerous commissions appointed from time to time to inquire into grievances of supersession between the English and Indian armies, or between different branches of the service, and the various warrants issued from time to time to redress such grievances. Even admitting that the Under-Secretary was a competent judge of the qualifications needful in general officers, it must be evident that the present system afforded an ample field of selection for all necessary purposes. As for the proposal to promote general officers by selection only, he (the Chief of the Staff) might at once say that such a plan would be found impracticable. It

would be greatly resented by the senior officers of the army, while he might frankly confess that the task would be too invidious for any one in his position to carry out. Finally, while fully recognising the right of the Secretary of State for War and Parliament to make any regulations they saw fit, he hoped he might be allowed to add that, in his opinion, it would be more becoming in a young officer with the limited experience of the Under-Secretary, although circumstances had placed him temporarily in a position of importance, to confine his attention to the matters of finance and administration which came within his province, and to leave questions of military organisation to be dealt with by those who were properly responsible for such matters.

Such was the purport of what the gallant old veteran said in his counter-memorandum, a document which gave general satisfaction in the office, being regarded as setting me down properly, and the tone of which made me glad that our first communication had been carried on through the medium of paper. "You were quite right," I observed to Strickland, "in your prediction that I should have to get rid of the incumbrance of my captaincy. The old gentleman shall not be able to twit me again with my juniority, any more than he can find fault with the seniority of Lord Stowe or any other civilian." And accordingly, before the week was out, our senior

subaltern, one Lieutenant Hopeful, saw his unexpected promotion in the Gazette, "to be Captain, vice West, who retires."

I suppose no man takes the irrevocable step of leaving the army without a pang. Certainly I did not, for my attachment to the "old regiment," as my friend Julian Straight used to call it, was at least as strong as his ; but I was too much in earnest about the work in hand to let any minor considerations stand in the way.

CHAPTER LI.

CONSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLES PRACTICALLY
ILLUSTRATED.

"There is something in the paper that will interest you, Eva," I said, as we were sitting at breakfast on the morning of my retirement being announced—or to be more correct, as I was standing by the fire after finishing my share of that meal, to which Eva had just descended.

"Is there? what is it about? Won't you read it out aloud? Oh dear, this tea is quite cold."

"It is the nature of hot fluids to accommodate themselves to the surrounding temperature, a phenomenon frequently to be observed in this establishment."

"You don't like cold tea better than other people. I suppose it was hot when you had yours."

"My dear, you twit me with my punctuality, but the man said you had sent word you should be down in five minutes, or I would not have allowed him to bring breakfast. That was about three quarters of an hour ago."

Eva made no reply, but sipped her cold tea in silence, whereon I observed that it was quite practicable to reproduce that beverage by the agency of boiling water; and as soon as this idea presented itself to her, she consented to my ringing the bell and ordering some more breakfast.

Somehow the little incident turned our attention away from the news in the paper, and she did not hear of my retirement till the evening. "You must not go on speaking of your husband as 'Captain' any longer, Mrs West," said my private secretary, as we three sat by the drawing-room fire, just after a visitor had gone down-stairs, for he and I had been working at home all the day, memoranda writing. "You must not call him 'captain' now, you know; for although he is entitled to the designation by courtesy, I have it in command to say that he wishes to drop it as soon as possible."

To Eva looking at me in surprise, I explained briefly that I had retired from the service.

She did not ask my reasons for the step, but showed perhaps more animation than usual when exclaiming, "Do you mean to say, Charlie, that you are never going to wear any uniform again?"

"Not unless they make me honorary colonel of the Leatherby Volunteers some fine day."

"Well, I *am* sorry. And fancy your doing this and never telling me anything about it!"

"My dear, I was on the point of telling you this

morning when you turned off the conversation. And considering that I have worn uniform about twice since we were married, the event need not signify much from that point of view."

"Ah, but then you might perhaps have taken to it again. You know you often used to say that you might have to go back to your battery after a time, and then it would have been so nice to see you galloping about at the head of it."

"I am sorry to disappoint your noble ambition, my dear, but it is too late to recall the step now. As a matter of fact, however, I should have been galloping at the tail of the battery only, instead of the head, since it is Major Spuraway who commands it. But you must submit to the degradation of your husband being only a subordinate official instead of a captain of artillery, for I find that politics and soldiering do not go well together."

Eva pouted a little, as she often did when she thought I was speaking ironically. Presently she continued, "I suppose I have done or said something silly from your satirical manner. Because you think of nothing else but politics and stuff of that sort, you expect everybody else to know all about them too. I think you are very hard on me. Besides, you know you told me yourself what a capital thing it was for Major Tuffenut to be in Parliament, because he could take six months' leave every year without asking for it, and bother the Government with all

sorts of foolish questions: and then there is old Lord Gowtitose; he is a general, isn't he? and he is in the House of Peers, and you are only in the Commons."

"My dear, those are two most appropriate precedents; nevertheless believe me I had reasons for the step, although they might not commend themselves to your judgment."

"Oh, if you mean to talk like that," retorted Eva, "we had better stop. I see you mean to be very severe."

I did stop; for in truth I was ashamed at recollecting that a third person was present. And again I was reminded what a change had come over our life. Want of sympathy on one side, and disappointment on the other begotten of the discovery, finding outlet at first in gentle remonstrance, when any re- crimination was checked at once by the ready-flowing tears, leading to soothing apologies and pretty little confidences—had brought us to this already; the little lovers' quarrels of a few months ago, to be succeeded already by biting words and petulant replies! Perhaps had I been less preoccupied I should have asked myself the question more distinctly, whither we were tending? and seen the folly of sacrificing our happiness to selfish pride and indolence of mood,—of drifting thus helpless at the mercy of each gust of vain temper. But business always came after these little scenes—now, alas! of frequent occurrence

—pressing on, to drive away the impulse for self-examination,—always whispering a plausible excuse for negligence in the conduct of home life.

Our guest, who had been silent during this little quarrel, now broke in upon the succeeding silence, as we all leaned back in our chairs round the fire, with a suggestion that Eva should practise a duet with him. And as she rose and moved to the piano, it seemed to me, as I moodily watched her from my seat, that her figure, slight and fragile as ever, yet expressed less of that graceful gentleness which used to appear in every movement that she made. The change in temper seemed to be signified by something of a harder carriage. Yet, noticing this, I was too sullen and proud to take the warning to heart.

But whatever Eva might think about my retirement from the army, I had reason to congratulate myself on the propriety of the step when, a day or two later, I met the Chief of the Staff by appointment in Lord Stowe's room at the office. The old gentleman, I could see, felt both embarrassed and ready to take offence, as if expecting that I should take advantage of the situation. Sympathising with him in his evident anxiety, I endeavoured by my manner to dispel his suspicions, placing a seat for him before I sat down myself, and generally expressing as much deference for his rank and age as was compatible with the situation.

“Well now, Sir Roderic,” said Lord Stowe, when

we were seated, "about these different changes which West has brought forward. He is pressing me to make a beginning ; and I may say that I am committed to some extent, both to him and to the Cabinet, to take the matter up. I think if we discuss it now, we might perhaps be able to come to some definite conclusion."

This was the most business-like opinion I had heard Lord Stowe express, and made me feel quite hopeful and animated.

"Well, my lord," said the old general, "I daresay there is a great deal that is very clever and ingenious in this scheme of Captain West's——"

"Mr West, if you please, Sir Roderic."

"Oh yes," he continued, "I was aware you had retired ; but you know the old saying, 'Once a captain always a captain.'"

"Once a captain never more a captain, in my case. I think it will simplify matters if you omit all reference to my supposed military experience or inexperience, whichever you will, and consider me merely as a civil official, responsible to Lord Stowe and to Parliament, and desiring that any proposals I may submit to him should be judged on their own merits."

It was amusing to notice the effect of this remark, and how, as the old general gradually got rid of the notion that he was not dealing with a military junior, or a military man of any sort, his touchiness and uneasy pride disappeared, and he became free and

unembarrassed, even deferential; for Sir Roderic, like many of our senior officers, had been so long accustomed to the control of superior authority that he was by no means disposed to assert himself.

The change was equally marked with Burley and other officials, as soon as by degrees they got out of the habit of calling me Captain West; although I was made to feel that my position would have been a still stronger one if I had never been in the army, and knew nothing at all about military affairs.

"Of course it is so," said Strickland, when I mentioned to him that I still felt a sense of the old leaven about me. "Do you suppose that Buoyers would have been allowed to knock the fellows at the Admiralty about as he has done, if he had ever been a post-captain himself, or even a midshipman? I feel much more respect for you myself since you have become a plain Mister; but it will be some time before I shall be able to bring myself quite to believe in your capacity to be Secretary of State, as I might have done if you had never held a commission."



CHAPTER LII.

CAPTAIN STRICKLAND RETURNS TO
REGIMENTAL DUTY.

THE course of events that now followed at the office may be disposed of in a few words. Of the interminable discussions that took place on every conceivable point; the memoranda that were written, and the rejoinders put forth; the verbal and written arguments that were piled up upon every item of the proposals; how, while everybody professed himself ready to carry out any changes that were ordered, he advanced a string of reasons why they should be suspended; how, while Lord Stowe assented to every proposal submitted to him, he assented equally to every counter-proposal, always siding with the last speaker or writer, and becoming a mere post-office for the circulation of minutes and counter-minutes; how, when he had agreed to a specific proposition, and the order embodying it was laid on his table for signature, he bespoke my attention next day to somebody's paper of objections, as containing matter

worthy of careful consideration ; how Burley, while openly opposing nothing, fired off a series of memoranda which, so far as they could be understood, always culminated in a proposal to call for some additional tabular return ; how the simplest issue thus got to be lost sight of, obscured by the mass of correspondence that grew up around it ;—how, in short, Lord Stowe, between his apparent desire to gain reputation as an administrative reformer, his fear of making changes in face of any opposition, and the indolence which kept him from mastering thoroughly a single one of the subjects he had to deal with, forcing him to shelter himself behind a mass of generalities and platitudes—had effectually set us all at cross purposes ; all this need not be detailed at length. The only result of these weary days was, that while every one was hard at work on the generation of friction, a certain degree of mental heat being naturally evolved in the process, and life generally at the office being anything but pleasant or amicable, the time drew near for moving the army estimates, and not a single point was settled of the proposals under discussion.

In this dilemma I took the opportunity afforded by finding myself next to Mr Merrifield on the Treasury bench one night, to mention my difficulty to him. Lord Stowe, I said, was constantly promising to bring these matters before the Cabinet, but he always brought away the same excuse that the time

of the meeting was occupied with other matters, and he could not find an opportunity.

"What Stowe says is quite true," said the Premier, smiling grimly ; "I am afraid the Cabinet does not take much interest in these matters. Certainly I have never professed to do so myself. But surely there are a great many points that may be dealt with departmentally without coming before the Cabinet at all ? I have no doubt that whatever you and Stowe agree upon will be accepted by the Government."

"But that is just the point. I can't get Lord Stowe to agree to anything."

"That," said Mr Merrifield, sarcastically, "would certainly be a reason for not doing anything."

"I don't mean that exactly. Lord Stowe has nothing to say against any of my proposals. On the contrary, I gather that he approves generally of the whole scheme. But the different heads of departments are by no means unanimous—it would be wonderful if they were ; but the result is, that between the conflicting opinions brought before him, Lord Stowe cannot make up his mind——"

"Well, of course the first step in matters of this kind is to convince the people who are responsible for carrying out the change. If you cannot satisfy them of the propriety of your proposed reforms, that would be *prima facie* ground for questioning their expediency."

"But I thought I had at least satisfied you, Mr

Merrifield, of the soundness, nay, the absolute need, for these changes——”

“My dear West,” said he, interrupting me, “I must have said a great deal more than I meant if I ever led you to suppose that I was prepared to commit the breach of official etiquette that you seem to imply I intended. I may frankly say that your views seemed to me original and ingenious; and I have not ceased,” he added, kindly, “to congratulate myself on having secured your services to the Government, especially in your present office. And as I said before, anything you and Stowe agree to will no doubt be accepted. But I can’t force changes upon the head of a department; and in fact you must see that it is somewhat of a breach of etiquette to be discussing the matter with you at all in this way.”

I felt the deserved rebuke, and also that the Minister most likely considered me an impulsive block-head. For holding belief in ourselves we must feel that others believe in us. Complete depression of mind now succeeded my former over-sanguine mood; and feeling that I was merely giving trouble and rousing opposition to no purpose, a desire to be quit of office increased as the session advanced, so that it wanted much less than the complications which arose out of my statement on the estimates to induce me to take the decisive step.

This *contretemps* was of the kind apt to arise when people trust to verbal understandings, even where

the views held on both sides are quite specific and distinct, as was certainly not the case in this instance; and if Lord Stowe did not show perfect frankness in what passed subsequently, I give him credit for good faith of intention. The affair was, of course, too important to be disposed of without explanations; for my announcement, when moving the estimates, of various contemplated changes (which Lord Stowe the previous day had specifically agreed that I should refer to on the occasion), naturally attracted a good deal of public attention, and some of the papers expressed decided approval of what was proposed. The *Overseer* in particular warmly adopted what it termed Lord Stowe's scheme; and in an eloquent article entitled "The Development of Political Genius," explained how Lord Stowe's powers had been gradually increasing in the course of a long public career; and how, while some great men, as Pitt, Newton, and Napoleon, displayed their greatest powers from the first, others, like Marlborough and Palmerston, and now Lord Stowe, did not reach the full measure of their capacity till late in life.

This article came out on a Saturday, two days after the affair had been terminated by my resignation. For immediately after I sat down, on the evening in question, Mr Merrifield, who was in the House, moved down to the next seat on the bench, and said with some warmth that Lord Stowe had gone considerably beyond what was authorised by anything

agreed to in the Cabinet or by himself; and when Mr Perkyman getting up on the other side said that the House and the Opposition would need time to consider the radical measures contemplated by the Government, and proposed the adjournment of the debate for a fortnight, Mr Merrifield, in agreeing to the proposal, expressed himself in such vague terms as partly furnished a cue to the actual state of the case.

As regards what the Premier had said to myself, it was not for me to defend Lord Stowe from the charge of having gone beyond his authority, but I was certainly quite unprepared for Lord Stowe's complete repudiation of me and my speech the next day. He could, of course, appeal to the Cabinet as to the fact that he had not been authorised to sanction the various changes which I had announced as impending; but this was no proof that he had not completely misled me on the matter. However, it was not for me to bandy recriminations with my chief. I had committed the false step of acting on his verbal assent, without obtaining his agreement in black and white to making the announcement, and must take the consequences. Resignation of my post was the only course open. Mr Merrifield wrote very kindly, expressing his hope that the matter might be more easily accommodated, and saying he would not act upon my letter until I had reconsidered the matter; but I felt that there was only one way out of a false

position. There could be no more serving under Lord Stowe.

This affair, of course, attracted some attention ; questions were asked in the House, and Mr Ernest moved for papers, but was told that there were no papers on the subject, and no explanations to give. My friendly patron the *Overseer* gave indeed a circumstantial account of the affair. Lord Stowe, it was explained, was for a militia ballot and a volunteer army, while I went in for a general conscription ; but the Cabinet were divided on the measure, and supported the former by a small majority. It had therefore been arranged that one of the two should make way for the other, and the lot had fallen on me. But it was to be hoped the services of Colonel West (of late the *Overseer* would persist in calling me a colonel) would be utilised in some other way. "Why should not he be made chief of the staff, with brevet rank of general if necessary ? Sir Roderic Baton was a very old man." The *Dial's* account of the affair was more authentic ; and its verdict in the case was that the country was generally satisfied with the moderate reforms introduced by Mr Thorowcome, which were more suited to our complex civilisation, and a practical nation, than the more systematic scheme which it was understood Mr West desired to press upon the Government. The English law was complex ; so was the English railway system ; and so, no doubt, ought to be the English military ad-

ministration. Complexity was suited to the genius of a practical people like ours. At the same time, should circumstances ever conspire to compel us to adopt a more thorough military organisation, the needful capacity for giving effect to the will of the nation would be recognised as to be found in the late Under-Secretary.

But a judicious reticence will soon divert public attention. Lord Stowe said nothing, for reasons best known to himself; and I declined to give any explanations to anybody, even to my constituents. The Government allowed the matter to drop quietly; and in a short time it was forgotten, overlaid by fresh subjects of interest.

CHAPTER LIII.

UNDERSTANDINGS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

ALTHOUGH determining without hesitation to resign office, as the only fitting course to pursue under the circumstances described in the last chapter, I felt, nevertheless, possessed by intense mortification of spirit at my egregious political failure. To have failed in carrying my point at once was the smallest part of the matter; I had not been very sanguine of speedy success. Success, in such matters, must follow the development of public opinion, which will usually be a slow process. But to be looked upon as an impracticable enthusiast, still worse, as an unsafe impulsive man, of a sort to say rash things unauthorised, and commit the Government to wild schemes—in other words, to be set down as a political blockhead, the iron of these reflections entered into my soul. I would fain have hidden myself for a time, and the doctor more than hinted that a trip to the south of Europe was desirable for Eva; but somehow the desire to hold on to the present life

was stronger, much as a man may shrink from leaving a company of persons whom he suspects will fall to discussing him when his back is turned. Thus I became more constant than ever in attendance on the House, in my new seat behind the Treasury bench, calm and unconcerned without, consumed by vexation within.

Yet the change from the engrossing over-occupation of eager official life to complete leisure was not without its sense of enjoyment. To have the whole day at command, instead of being obliged to lay out its disposal for every minute beforehand ; even to be able to dawdle over the newspaper of a morning, conveyed a feeling of relief, although it was not without a pang of jealousy that I thought how readily the office would get on without me, and how much satisfaction my absence would cause in certain quarters. Moreover, I was now able to devote some time to my wife, and had leisure to perceive, what I had overlooked before,—or pretended to overlook, in that common form of selfishness which makes the performance of one duty the excuse for neglecting another,—how lonely my busy preoccupation must have made her life. And then it came upon me, almost like a revelation, how by insensible degrees Eva had moved apart upon a separate life of her own, to escape from her solitude, and had now her own tastes, pleasures, and occupations, in which I took no share. The very visitors who came and went were

people whom I had never met before, and Eva had her own special engagements, which she could not break off at once even for my company. I discovered, in short, that we were leading two separate lives, and this before we had been two years married.

Eva, however, was very pleased to have her husband back again—so much so, indeed, that she could find no room for sympathy in his disappointment. “Shall you be at home to dinner to-day, Charlie?” said she, on the morning following the day of my resignation; “because, you know, Mary comes to-day, and if you can’t come home we two would dine early after going to one or two drums, and I would take her to the Truly Classical Concerts in the evening. Mary likes that sort of thing,—it wouldn’t bore her a bit.”

My gentle helpless Eva, who last year could not have walked down the street without losing her way, to be now talking of taking anybody else anywhere! And I had been so preoccupied as hardly to have noticed the change!

“This being a Wednesday, my dear, there is no evening sitting at the House, and I shall be glad to have the honour of dining with you, and even of going to the Concert afterwards, if you can manage a place for me. The fact is,” I added, after a pause, “you are like to have me a good deal on your hands, for I have just resigned my office, and come home for good.”

“What! given up that horrid office, and come

home for good? Oh," cried Eva, with a flush of pleasure, and looking quite animated, "that *is* nice. But ah!" she added, observing that my face did not express any ecstatic response, "I see you are sorry about it; I have been blundering as usual; I ought to have remembered how dearly you liked being in Parliament. How stupid I am, to be sure, not to know that this would be a disappointment!"

"I did not say I had given up Parliament, Eva—you go too fast. I hope to continue in that honourable position so long as the electors of Leatherby may be pleased to retain my poor services, although that may not be long, perhaps, for they have come to consider it almost a matter of right to be represented by a Government official. No, my dear, the only resignation I referred to was of my appointment as Under-Secretary of State, which perhaps you may be aware I have been holding of late. Well, it is an ill wind that blows no good. Lord Stowe is pleased; the office is pleased; and you are pleased—all which is a great consolation."

"Ah, now I see that you are angry with me from your bitter way of speaking. I did not mean to offend you." As Eva said this with a little pout, relapsing into silence, I could not help again reflecting how differently the course of the little quarrel would have gone a few months ago. Then the storm would have been followed by rain and sunshine; but there was no sign of those accompaniments

now, and I was too proud and priggish to try and soften her mood.

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the servant to ask at what time the carriage should be sent for Miss Drew.

This visit of Mary Drew came to solve a difficulty about which I had been much exercised, for although preoccupied with my official schemes to the extent of neglecting Eva, I had been anxious ever since her sister left us that she should have a suitable companion at home, to say nothing of some assistance in her domestic duties. Even a housekeeper for that matter would have been a useful addition to our party, to keep the establishment in order; but there was hardly room for such a personage in our present house. Aunt Emily could not be persuaded to leave Leatherby and Aunt Honoria, although her little house in Church Street was dull without the young people who had brightened it for so many years; Mrs Herries, who had promised us a long visit during another prolonged absence of her husband, was ill, and ordered to the south of France; and I was fairly puzzled what arrangement to propose, when the difficulty was settled by the Squire's consent to his daughter's spending the season with us in town. Young and inexperienced as was Mary Drew, that young lady possessed a large fund of mother wit and good sense; and perhaps some of the easy power which she displayed in the manage-

ment of her father's establishment might have its indirect effect in supplying certain too patent deficiencies in our ill-ordered household. At any rate Eva would have a loving friend and a companion in every way desirable.

"I do hope Mr Drew won't screw Mary down to a very small allowance," said Eva, as I went off to meet her at the station; "it will be terrible if she comes up to town looking a fright."

"Fancy Mary looking a fright!"

"No, I don't mean that: of course Mary would always look nice whatever she had on, but I shouldn't like to see her wearing old-fashioned bonnets and things, like she used to have at home. I am sure you would not like it either, for you are dreadfully particular about ladies' dresses yourself."

"I don't think we need be apprehensive on that score; I suspect the Squire's days of screwing are numbered now. He will have to conform to his daughter's notions of propriety in this as in other things, or I am much mistaken."

And indeed any one who had seen the young lady as she stepped out of the railway carriage, would not have associated any ideas of a miserly father with her appearance, although her dress was perhaps the last thing that would have attracted attention; for without Eva's pretensions to beauty, Mary's face expressed enough of sweetness and light to be noticeable in any company.

"Indeed the obligation is all on your side," I re-

marked, in reply to something she said about the kindness of our invitation, as we drove away from the station. "No doubt you will enjoy being with Eva as much as she will enjoy having you here; but, over and above the pleasure we expect from your visit, I feel that Eva wants a companion sadly now that Sibyl has left us; I fear, too, she finds a London household more than she can manage, and may frankly say that I have a selfish hope she may gain a useful hint or two from your powers of administration."

"Dear Eva!" said Mary, warmly,—and then catching my eye, she looked confused and blushed, feeling, as I could see, that she had done wrong in speaking in a tone of compassion. Then an awkward pause ensued, for I also felt I had said too much in even hinting at my wife's defects to one so quick of comprehension, and was annoyed at the confession: my companion also evidently felt distressed at the sort of unintentional understanding set up. And we drove on to the house in silence.

That evening was one of the pleasantest we had passed for a long time. The two girls had endless things to say to each other, and in the excitement of welcoming her friend, Eva had lost for the time her usual languid expression, and looked, as we sat down to dinner, quite fresh and blooming.

"And so my course of dissipation is to begin at once," said Mary. "I was prepared for a season of

wild excitement from what Eva has told me of her London life, but are we actually to make a first plunge this very night?"

"I don't know what you call wild excitement, my dear, but you will have to sit perched in your chair for a couple of mortal hours, without being able to move, or having a soul to speak to, for if you venture even to whisper at the Truly Classics, everybody looks round and frowns as if they were ready to eat you up. All the young ladies who patronise these things are awfully strong-minded-looking creatures, who take their music with them, and spell it out with their fingers as the band goes on, just as if it were a novel. And such frights as you will see there, too, and ever so many false fronts. I suppose so much classical music in the head makes the hair fall off. But the fact is, Charlie got these tickets because he said you would like that style of thing; and he likes it himself too. It is the only thing I can ever get him to go to."

"So, then, we are to have the honour of your company, Mr West? I thought you were too much engrossed in affairs of State to have any time for frivolous amusements and the society of womankind?"

"No, my dear Mary, that state of things has happily passed away. I am no longer keeping company with your godlike friends. My Ministerial days are over. I was tried in the balance and found wanting. So that little episode is ended."

"That is indeed bad news," exclaimed Mary, in an earnest tone; "how sorry——"

"This resignation of Charlie's comes in so fortunately," broke in Eva, "just as you are here, Mary, doesn't it? for now he will be able to go about with us a little, and you will be able to see something of him, which you would certainly not have done, if he had been still going to that horrid office. I declare I used hardly to see him from one week's end to another."

Mary looked confused, and I thought I could read her mind. She was distressed at perceiving that Eva and I were at cross purposes, and also that there should be this understanding involuntarily created between us on the subject. At any rate she made no more condolences on my resignation, and I appreciated the motive which enforced her silence.

"Yes," Eva went on, "this political life is a horrid one. When first we came to London it seemed delightful to have Charlie an M.P.; and then when he was appointed to the Government, everybody congratulated me, and said he was such a rising man, and it seemed all very nice; but I had no notion then what horrid work it was, and how I should be left all day without a soul to speak to. I am sure I hope he will never be a Government member again."

This was the first outspoken complaint of the kind Eva had made,—made now, perhaps, only because she was excited and emboldened by the presence of her

friend. I felt an uneasy pang at this confirmation of my lately-born qualms of conscience, but I was annoyed to think how our visitor would be sure to misinterpret the speech. She would never suppose it was the first of the kind, but would surely think that my neglect of her had been often spoken of before between Eva and me. It would have been easy, however, to lead up to this inference by a gentle answer, but pride and vanity came in the way, and I replied—

“I did not know it was so very lonely, my dear, and I think it must have been so only at first. It seems to me that now you are never alone for a minute. Either there are people here, or you are out somewhere, all day long. A regular racket you will find she is, Mary, and you will need to be in good condition to keep up the pace, I can assure you. But you are rather hard on me, Eva; I was no worse than all the other officials who care about their business. Many of them had five times the work I had to do. Look at Mr Merrifield, to say nothing of anybody else.”

“Oh, I know that; it is the same with you all. Lady Elizabeth says they can never be sure of him from one minute to another; and sometimes the horses are at the door, and Miss Merrifield sitting all ready dressed to go out riding, and then—after waiting, perhaps, for hours—her papa sends to say he can’t come.”

"At least you cannot lay our not riding together to my door. You know I promised to ride regularly every day without fail, if you would only begin again."

"Has Eva given up riding?"

"My dear, since I had that tumble I have lost all my courage; I tried it once or twice, but I was so dreadfully nervous, it was perfect misery. Every step the horse took I thought he was going to fall."

"I hope Eva's nerves will come back again by-and-by," I observed. "I miss the rides greatly, for a solitary canter in the Park is a form of agony I have not been able to face."

"You know you are really very glad to be off your promise," retorted Eva; "you can get to that dear office of yours all the earlier."

"You need not twit me with that longing, now that I am locked out of it."

"I suppose, however," said our guest, "Mr West does not mean to remain out in the cold for ever?"

"My dear Mary, I am what the *Round World* calls one of 'Mr Merrifield's young men,' and the same oracle pronounces that all those young men turn out failures, to be tried for a season and discarded. Mr Braham is the only person who can discover the germs of sucking statesmanship."

"The number of such trials must of course have been enormous. Mr Fergusson says we should never draw an average under a million, so perhaps

some of the failures may be more fortunate. I should say, however, that some one we know is a little ambitious, and will be heard of again before long, as Harry Perkins would say."

"If you mean Charlie," said Eva, "he is dreadfully ambitious, I know; and for all his talk about being so glad to have time to be dangling about us, I have no doubt he is longing all the time to be Chancellor of the Exchequer, or Lord Chancellor, or something of that sort, and means to be before long."

Here again there was a difficulty in pursuing the conversation.

CHAPTER LIV.

NEWSPAPER BOYS DRIVE A BRISKER TRADE.

THE heavy sense of disappointment—morbid and disproportioned as it was, no doubt, in comparison with the occasion—which at first oppressed me as I surveyed the blank political waste before me, after my fiasco and retirement from office, was soon succeeded by a more healthy frame of mind, and I began to think that perhaps, after all, things had turned out for the best. The country was tired of the Army question, even of Autumn Manceuvres (for it was boldly stated that those held in Yewces-
tershire would be the last of the kind), and attention was now concentrated on the Local Taxation Bill, and the great Home Rule question, and the session promised to be, from my special point of view, of a thoroughly humdrum kind. Evidently, then, I should have pressed on my pet project to no purpose; I should have come to grief in this way sooner or later, and it was perhaps just as well that my career ended when it did. Thinking thus, I sat

watching from my seat in the back benches with a sort of grim humour, the tedious progress of the Parliamentary game, and the occasional utterances of my successor (another of Mr Merrifield's young men, said the *Round World*), and his feeble efforts to make lucid statements on a subject he knew nothing about.

And yet already the small cloud had appeared in the political horizon, soon to expand into the dark pall which hung above us and around on all sides, presaging a tempest which, when it burst, would involve the whole civilised world. Then Englishmen began to realise the sort of feelings experienced by our forefathers during the great twenty years' war. Europe had undergone its revolutions, indeed, of late years, as great in kind as any that had happened before. New kingdoms had been born, great monarchies had been crushed, but happy England had stood aloof out of the strife and tumult; and although we too had had our wars, they had been always waged on some far-off shore, and were at most affairs of sentiment or of a few millions of debt, hardly ruffling the smooth surface of English political life. But now men could begin to sympathise with the anxious forebodings of their grand-sires, when they asked how the country could stand up against the power arrayed against it, and blamed—while admiring—the boldness of the great statesman of that day, who maintained the unequal contest

with undaunted front, while thrones were crumbling around, and one effort after another to stem the current of the common enemy's success proved unavailing and disastrous. Of course the danger which now threatened us was not of the same kind as before. History does not repeat itself so closely ; and whereas formerly the danger came from one unscrupulous man, borne on the stream of a new-found popular force, the cloud that now overshadowed Europe took the form of a coalition supported by the strength of great empires, united, in a pact of violence, and organised up to the highest point of military perfection. If such a force as this is united, whether for good or ill, who—it was asked—shall withstand it? What, at any rate, are we, that we should do so? Why, it was also asked, should we trouble ourselves in the matter? We are not bound to defend treaties or to play the Don Quixote of Europe. Others, again, took a bolder line. Effacement of England is not to be thought of ; money after all is the sinews of war ; and besides, think how good our army is, if somewhat small. Let England only go boldly into the game, she will surely turn up trumps. Ideas more or less divergent, which press and statesmen endeavoured to express in coherent form. There were, in fact, as Mr Braham put it in his great speech on the subject, three courses open to be pursued. There was, first, the policy of abstention. That was at least a definite

policy, although it might prove to be not in accord with the instincts of the country. Then there was the policy of armed neutrality. Lastly, there was the policy of a system of alliances, with or without intervention. But while Mr Braham left it to be inferred that, in his opinion, a good deal might be said in favour of non-intervention, he still appeared to cling to the good old English idea of trying to go into the business with a powerful navy and a little army, in which he had plenty of supporters; and accordingly, while a good deal used to be heard about the need for a bold and dignified policy worthy of a great country, the conception of this policy seemed invariably to culminate in the sending of 30,000 men somewhere, say to Antwerp, although one place was considered pretty much as good as another, provided only the 30,000 men were sent. These propositions, handled till from familiarity they seemed to have the force of axiomatic truths, were bandied about pretty freely in various quarters, in Parliament as well as in the papers of the day, whether with or without a world-wide circulation,—that England could not go to war without allies; that England must always have a small army; and that 30,000 British soldiers, if only put down somewhere or other, would be sure to do something effective.

Meantime, while the storm seemed to come nearer every day, and the air to grow darker; when rumours

increased about what the diplomatists were doing, and dissertations multiplied on the legal construction to be put on the three points at issue—letters of Grotius Anglicanus in the *Dial* [generally ascribed to Rigby Sebright] especially admired, as showing that in point of international law the crowned heads had not a metaphorical leg to stand on ;—while talk of this kind gradually gave place to discussions about armaments and campaigns and strategy, the national mind wavered in undecided fashion, seeking for the guidance of its rulers. And some said the national mind was feeble and uncertain, because it gave forth as yet no certain utterance. But it was not so. Nations, like individual men, may distrust their own opinions, and lean for guidance on others, and yet have opinions of their own ; and after all who should know better than our rulers what is proper to be done ? They can see beyond us ; if the pilot is calm, surely there can be no rocks ahead.

It was while in this mood of trustfulness and diffidence that the nation saw itself overreached on a former memorable occasion ; saw the treaty torn up without a struggle, which had cost two years of war and a bridge of dead men's bones to arrive at. Seems wrong and weak, said the nation. But then our agents are honourable men and shrewd ; if they be satisfied, why should we be non-content ?

In such case was the country now : asking itself anxiously whether those were true prophets who

said that the aim and end of all things was to work up more and more iron, and to spin more and more cotton ; whether it were right to go on working while the world was burning, or whether at least there might not be a point where the delving and spinning should stop, and all hands apply themselves to put out the conflagration. Are there not duties to mankind, it was asked, as well as to ourselves, and has not the time come for performing them ? Some, again, said that although we should never fight for others, but only for ourselves, and that national honour above everything was a mere shibboleth, yet was not this a case where we should fight in national defence ? Abstention from the strife, said these doctors, will avail nothing against the crafty and unscrupulous foes who are now arbiters of the fate of Europe ; our time will come, sooner or later ; better, then, throw in our lot with the good cause at once ; single sticks may be snapped where a fagot can resist ; above all, let us forthwith send 30,000 men to Antwerp or other unknown spot.

While such eager questionings went on in the press, in the House, in the street, in the train, the nation still waited for answer from its rulers, and men asked each other anxiously, above all, what line Mr Merrifield would take. Merrifield a true patriot, said one organ of opinion—no man more ready to uphold honour when honour is really at stake. True patriot, said another, but too pure-

mind for these crafty diplomats ; will think Von Uberlisten to be as honest as himself, and so will surely be overreached. Honest enough at heart, said a third, but a born casuist ; will betray the country through his love for over-refining. And truly when the great blue-book was published, and the eye alighted on the famous passage containing Von Uberlisten's contemptuous retort on our ambassador, in reply to his message, that if England would under no circumstances make war to defend her treaties or the rights of other nations, she had better keep silence and not interfere with what did not concern her, then a storm of indignation arose. In vain did Mr Merrifield urge that the statement would bear another interpretation, and that it might be supposed the Count was merely putting these words into the ambassador's mouth, as a hypothetical case of his own, and not as professing to repeat anything that had been said by the latter ; people would have it that the words must be taken in their literal sense, and great was the fear and the anger aroused. Honour of the country will be betrayed by these men, was the cry ; and but faint defence was set up even by recognised organs, with world-wide and the largest circulation—circulation it was felt to be retained only by adopting the feelings of the nation ; while the *Dial*, which had been some time hovering above the situation in an atmosphere of platitudes, now swooped down with pene-

trating beak, pecking away ruthlessly at Ministerial reputation.

And now every one turned to see what Mr Braham would do. Country looks to Mr Braham to uphold its place among the nations, said a lofty press ; Brammy will have his innings at last, said the clubs. And the statesman appealed to, nothing loth, thereon brought forward his famous resolution—that, in the opinion of this House, her Majesty's Government, by their proceedings in regard to the High Secret Alliance, as recorded in page 52 of the papers lately presented to Parliament, "have failed to maintain the honour and dignity of the country and the interests and wellbeing of humanity"—famous resolution, supported in the orator's best manner. Old politicians said it was the best speech he had ever made ; certainly it displayed him by turns in all his moods, solemn, sarcastic, vicious, and vague ; altogether extremely telling.

Ministry will not wait for a division, says club gossip ; hopeless break-up of party ; Glissereene [Mr Glissereene was the Government whip] tries to look cheerful, but his heart must fail him really ; majority against them will be a hundred at least ; better resign at once and have done with it.

Resign ? Not a bit of it. Stand up and fight it out. At any rate, if Mr Merrifield had betrayed the honour of the country there was no want of pluck in fighting his own battle. If Mr Braham had made a great effort, his opponent was more than equal to


the occasion. No subtlety or over-refinements now, but outspoken manly sense, and straightforward argument; and when he came to that splendid passage, so often quoted since, where he said that men, and statesmen above all men, should live for the future rather than the present, and that, whatever the result might be now, the time was coming when the voice of humanity, ever gaining in power, would pronounce a verdict in his favour, then it seemed as if the House was almost won over by the noble thoughts and the noble manner of their expression. I think I hear his clear voice still ringing in my ears as he brought his great peroration to a close. If a speech could save a cause, surely the danger is fended off.

It was worth while to have a seat in Parliament in those days, even a back seat, as the great debate went on from one night to another, while the reports were greedily devoured as the morning broke, and all Europe waited for the issue. No room for the bores now; no parish politics permitted; you must speak to the point or be silent; above all, you must keep a guard on your temper, for men tend to grow heated as the debate goes on. Not that a certain discursiveness did not perforce arise out of the subject, being nothing less than the honour of the country and the welfare and happiness of other nations. And one speaker from a back bench ventured among others to raise an issue, which, if it bore on the subject, was yet deemed to partake of the original.

CHAPTER LV.

THE ETHICS OF WAR.

YOU say, argued the speaker, that intervention is impracticable, therefore let us practise non-intervention. Let us mind our own business, and wait at any rate until we are attacked ; then do the best we can for ourselves. We could not interfere effectively, therefore let us not interfere at all. The days have gone by when small armies could be of use, therefore let us keep our small army out of the strife, keep it at least for home use. But is there really no course between futile action and no action at all ? Why should England be the only country in the world which cannot put forth its strength when needful cause arises ? Why should that be impossible for us which is possible for others ? Does freedom indeed incapacitate for action ? There are as many of our countrymen fit to carry arms as France could muster when she set herself in array against the rest of Europe, and each man's life and labour are worth as much across the Atlantic as ours



are worth to us. What then the French could do, and our kinsmen in the West in their great struggle, is equally possible for Englishmen. No further proof is wanted ; all that is really needful is to get rid of our old, half-hearted, blundering way of working, and if we go to war at all, to do it in the only way which can insure success.

But, it will be replied, these are the barbarous sentiments of a bygone age, which may still lead astray the other nations, or at least the despots who control their wills, but have lost their influence on us. Life is with us too highly valued, individual liberty is too well assured, for the English nation to consent to waste life and treasure in such wholesale fashion. You may call it degeneracy if you will, but the spirit of the age is opposed to such a sacrifice. Is that so ? are our present English youth, with their love of movement and activity, their pursuit of sport and adventure, their temperate habits, a less manly race than the poor dandies, or the Maccaronis, or the hard livers of seventy years ago ? Is there a wider gulf now than then between different classes, and a greater diversity of interests ? Are the national burdens harder to bear ? Is there greater fear of intestine discord arising, to come between the nation and the fulfilment of its will ? Is it not, on the contrary, plain at briefest glance that the nation is richer, more numerous, more united, more manly than it ever was before ; and shall it be said that we, who were ready

before to unite against tyranny and oppression, are now too soft and too selfish to answer the calls of duty and honour?

Yes, you will say, we can do all this if we choose to do it, but we know better. We have risen above the low moral standard of other nations, who would settle all disputes by the brutal arbitrament of arms. We reverence the sacredness of human life, nor will we commit the folly of maintaining opinions by force; the days of war for ideas, or of political crusades, are past for us, gone with the days of war for lust and conquest; we will not listen to your doctrine, whether you preach in the guise of a Quixote or a swashbuckler. But then to you in turn I reply, that you cannot detest war more than I do. Wicked and wasteful as you think it, I deem it to be more wicked and wasteful still, gazing with the mind's eye on the sickness and misery that follow in its train, unseen by those who know not what real war means, but far transcending the mere evil of the deaths that happen on the battle-field. It is bad enough that these last should happen, when we think of the useful life cut short, the mourning and the want made by each household gap; but war is not even what people at home are wont to picture it, dark though the colours be which they employ. It is bad enough to die on the battle-field, fighting for a good or a bad cause, as the chance may be; to die in the ecstasy of passion, with the shout of victory ringing in the ears, or

saved at least the knowledge of defeat. This, if it were all, would be bad enough ; but for one man who dies thus, dies gloriously as it is called, ten perish ignominiously, in the hospitals or the ditch, sacrificed to the selfishness or stupidity of others. And more, of those who are killed outright in battle, think how small the numbers whose lives are given up for any useful purpose, either of conquest or protection, compared with what are thrown away in blundering, sacrificed perchance by a stupid leader in an attack which is bound to fail, or in some idle skirmish, or at best in an indecisive action, no way affecting the final issue of the struggle ! Take all the wars of modern times and the loss in men on both sides ; subtract the deaths in hospitals, deaths traceable at bottom to folly, or dishonesty, or selfishness, or want of care ; deduct also the losses in useless attacks, false movements, and blunders generally ; deduct also the men killed in indecisive actions, (and how many actions are decisive ?) where the killed, like the pieces exchanged at chess, leave the two sides unaltered in position,—deduct all these, and how many remain ? Take away, lastly, the men who were killed fighting in a bad cause, and think how small is the residue of whom it can be said that their lives have been given up for any useful purpose !

Looked at in this way, we really come to see the wicked waste of war. And when people talk of

modern war being scientific, I reply that it is still barbarous and clumsy to the last degree. You may invent new weapons and improve old ones, but in our dealings with the men who handle them, we are still as in the dark ages. We do not seem to have learned yet that skilful men are still more important than skilful arms. A new rifle or a new shell may add its hundreds to the slain enemy, but a stupid or ignorant general will add his thousands lost on our side. And leaving out of sight the mere loss, does not all history teach us that great success in war is only gained by great generals? And yet, knowing this, and that in no other calling does success depend so emphatically on the character of the chief agents, how do we generally set to work to choose the agents to whom these awful issues are intrusted? Why, by rummaging the half-pay lists. Look at the men who have been chosen on these occasions for our brigades and divisions, often for chiefest posts, and ask how the choice was made. By interest, by seniority, by chance, by anything rather than merit. It is as if one were to be careful about providing the best paper and the best ink, and then to set anybody down to write the book. While this sort of recklessness is the rule, who shall say that modern war is not a crude and barbarous thing?

Further, I say that war is not even a chivalrous pursuit, as people often assert it to be ; and that, far from encouraging the nobler qualities, it makes men

selfish and callous to the sufferings of others. All this talk about the care of the wounded, and the devices now in fashion to soften the savagery of war, are really but a mere illogical deference to the claims of humanity. Were war carried out with consistency, the men who help their wounded comrades to the rear would be shot for quitting the ranks. Perfect war must needs be barbarous; it is imperfect war which allows these mitigations. Further, the chivalry of war has gone, whatever of that quality it may have once possessed. When men fought hand to hand, at least they had the excuse of passion, and those who dealt death most ran most risk also. But all this is now ended. Who ever saw the bayonet, "queen of weapons," used, save on some unresisting wounded wretch? How many sabres in an army are ever crimsoned with blood? No. Bayonets have no more count in battles nowadays than epaulettes, and sabres not much more. The killing is done now for the most part at a distance, and those suffer least themselves who cause the greatest damage. The safe service is the artillery, the service notwithstanding held most in estimation; and the days have gone when kings and leaders of armies waved their battle-axes in the van. Kings and commanders nowadays are mostly out of fire, ordering other people to go into it and get killed; a system necessary perhaps, but not to be called chivalrous.

Then as for the honourableness of war. The aim and



end of modern military skill is to have guns which carry further, shells which burst into more pieces, than any other nation; to be more ready than the other side to pour in deadly musketry at a given signal; in short, by invention and preparation to steal a march on your adversary and take him at a disadvantage. In what is all this better than the duellist's part, who seeks by overt skill with the pistol to get the better of any man with whom he picks a quarrel? And on what grounds, I ask, can we condemn the one and respect the other?

You see, then, that I do not hold war in more esteem than you; nay, further, when you, following the gossip of convention, talk about every dead soldier as having given up his life for the country, I say that most often he has done nothing of the sort, any more than those are examples of the needful condition of humanity who die of stinking drains or railway accidents; and I assert that war is no longer a chivalrous pursuit, and is only humane so far as it is unscientific. I believe, too, that whenever a state of real civilisation shall be reached, and the same principles of action imported into the intercourse of nations that already govern the relations between man and man, then posterity will look back with wonder on those whom they will class, as to their intercourse with other nations, with unchristian savages, no better morally than the ancients.

But then our hatred of war will not stop war;


benevolence and goodwill cannot be practised by one country alone ; arbitration cannot be applied so long as other nations are ready to carry out their aims, bad or good, by fire and sword. One nation cannot stand alone in giving up the use of war, if others are still bent on fighting. War, then, in some case may be forced even on us, peace-loving people that we are ; and I deny that we are going the right way to avoid it by appearing to be afraid either of raising men or spending money. So long as brute force is paramount in Europe, you must put forth your force if you would go unmolested.

Nor will it, as some say, be more costly to do so. Soldiers are costly in a rich country, but a rich country can best afford to pay for them ; and remember that the revolting instinctive love of fighting is still present here, strong if latent ; that there are limits to the forbearance of the nation ; and that when once it warms up to the work, it will want to go on fighting till it wins. Whether, then, is it better to spend fifty or even a hundred millions, and have done with the business, than to fritter away a much larger sum over a dozen years, and all to no purpose ? Very doubtful is it if war can be avoided ; but if it is to be warded off, it can only be by throwing our whole might into the business of arming, and showing ourselves ready if called upon to act as one of the great powers of Europe. But, above all, let us abandon all notion of a fatuous middle course ; nothing but danger and dis-

grace to be got by sending 30,000 men to Antwerp or other indefinite point.

Thus spake one from the back of the House behind the Treasury bench. The utterance made some sensation (philosophy of war for first time developed, said the *Overseer*; policy ingenious, but too systematic for a practical nation like ours, said the *Dial*), as did other speeches more or less to the point. But the question now at issue is not whether we should not get ready for war, but "whether her Majesty's Government have failed to maintain the honour and dignity, &c.;" or still more the amendment on that motion moved by Mr Rigby Sebright—amendment still more condemnatory; and interest centres in page 52 of the famous blue-book and construction to be placed thereon, on which the fate of Ministry depends. Five nights the great debate goes on, and is closed the sixth night or morning.

Then, when the murmurs of conversation, as members leave their seats and form little groups about the House, succeed for a space the cheers and counter-cheers amid which the last speech ended, there appears a strange portent. Mr Braham and others of the front Opposition row are no longer to be seen in their places! They have gone out before the division! What means this? is asked among the anxious and excited groups—Does Brammy want to save the Government after all, or is it merely disapproval of Rigby Sebright's interference? No one can say, only



that Opposition is left free to vote, and vote it does. Absence of leader and six others matters nothing on so great occasion. Well may Glissereene look pale—pale but calm, as he comes up with Rigby Sebright to the table—Ayes, 419 ; Noes, 321 : majority against the Government, 98.

But whence come these cheers and shoutings? Surely from both sides? Yes! there can be no doubt about it; this vote has broken up both parties: no question now of Whig or Tory, but of national honour even of national life.

CHAPTER LVI.

CHILTERN HUNDREDS IN GREAT DEMAND.

SUCH were the tidings in the morning papers, read with absorbing interest throughout the land, and discussed in every household. One eyewitness, at any rate, as he recounted that scene—a scene of excitement such as occurs only once and again in a Parliamentary life—at the domestic breakfast table, found one eager listener, and another at least interested.

“Must then the Ministry retire absolutely?” said our young guest; “what a sad thing!”

“Yes, Mary, no help for it; but there is another set of godlike creatures ready, waiting on the opposition Olympus.”

“How sad!” said Eva; “I suppose there will be an end of Lady Elizabeth’s receptions; they were so nice!”

“And who will be Prime Minister now?” asked Mary.

“Mr Braham, of course.”



"Ah! he will not be able to give parties," said Eva, "for he is only a bachelor."

Evening papers confirm the accuracy of my prediction. Mr Merrifield gone down to Windsor, say the first editions. Mr Merrifield returned from Windsor, say the second, and Mr Braham sent for. Report confirmed when the House meets; Ministers hold office only till successors are appointed. Mr Braham is again absent from his place. One day passes; two days pass; Mr Braham's arrangements are still immatured. Rumours follow of unexpected difficulties in making up a Ministry. Mr Sinnick [late Chancellor of the Exchequer], it is reported, has been asked to join (Tommy a Tory at heart, say the clubs), and declines. Rigby Sebright (a rising man, Rigby Sebright, say the clubs) also asked to join, and also declines. Tribune of the people and country party a happy combination, but not to come off this time. What is wanted, says the *Round World*, to bring us through the crisis, is a good cry. Perkymen and Purchase, for example, Resuscitation of Purchase, how will that do? Will not do at all; Purchase gone down to the limbo of the irrevocable, and will drag down Perkymen after it and he take not care. Perkymen and Sanitary Reform then? How would that do? A good cry that,—good cry at least in quieter times; but just now it is the sanitation of Europe which has to be made good—feat not to be


accomplished, it is thought, without stress of blood-letting and the like heroic remedies. Hawthorne Sturdy and our Labourers' Cottages? How would that sound? That also a good cry in its way, but too peaceful, not to say unexciting, at present. For between the state of Europe and the state of parties, and the rumbling of war coming ever nearer, the air is full charged with political electricity. The tension is felt even in the Minerva Club, generally devoted to literature and the muses, but where just now politics alone engross both mind and tongue. Even the bishops are excited, as they muster in their favourite resort, drinking their five o'clock tea jerkily by spoonfuls. One man alone is calm, sitting unconcerned amid the murmur of excitement, making notes from big folios at library table. Happy Duke of Ulster, exclaim the lookers-on with admiration; he too is out of office, but politics are nothing to him; his loss of office is a gain; he can now finish his great work on the Calculus of the Unthinkable. See the happy effect of scientific training! cry the men of science, watching proudly these silent labours; science the only pursuit to produce the true philosophic mind!

Meanwhile the days pass on, bringing nothing but rumours upon rumours, and increased sale of morning and evening papers, till at length Mr Braham makes his announcement in the House. Mr Braham is at once frank and mysterious. He cannot form a

Ministry. Friends not prepared to undertake responsibility of governing with a minority in face of present critical state of Europe. Mr Merrifield sent for to Windsor again; Mr Merrifield also makes statement next day. Declines to carry on Government after the late vote, and thinks time inappropriate for a dissolution. Merrifield is sulking, say ill-natured critics; intends to go out for a time, say others; thinks an airing out in the cold will act like a tonic on the party, and brace them up to better behaviour. Surely Lord Grandison must now be sent for. But no; Lord Grandison is the author of famous despatch at page 52 of blue-book, at any rate would have been the author had not fit of gout involved temporary delegation of despatch-writing to permanent Under-Secretary. Adverse resolution therefore directed as much against Foreign Secretary as Prime Minister; a Grandison Cabinet not possible just now.

Meanwhile, this dead-lock lasting, the public excitement and anxiety grow ever greater; as well they may, for how shall a nation fare in such times, when no one will govern it? At last the political tension is discharged by a manifesto in the *Dial*. In the present state of parties, says the oracle, when party landmarks are submerged in the flood that threatens even further devastation, safety of the country and preservation of our beloved constitution will be best secured by appointment to head of affairs

of a personage whose position and character shall be of a sort to secure the co-operation of the leading statesmen of all parties, and under whom it shall be no disparagement to the ablest politicians to serve. "Such a combination of qualifications," continues our oracle, "will be at once recognised as being present in a peculiar degree in the person of the Duke of Ulster, and we are glad to be able to announce that both Mr Merrifield and Mr Braham have consented to take an active part in the Administration which that distinguished nobleman has been instructed to form. The public will naturally inquire in what way a difficulty is to be surmounted which at once suggests itself—namely, how the just claims of these two statesmen to be each at the head of the Government in the House of Commons, can be satisfied; and we are glad to announce that the difficulty has already been overcome. Mr Braham, with a true patriotism which has never been wanting to his character, has gracefully waived his claim to the leadership in favour of his former opponent and present colleague, on the just plea that his greater age may fairly exempt him from the labours of the post, which has accordingly, though not without protest, been accepted by Mr Merrifield. The country may be congratulated on an arrangement which secures the great business capacity and mastery of details of the one for the irksome duties of leader, aided by the persuasive management of the other, while the ex-



ample set by these eminent men, of subordination of self-interest to the public good, affords the happiest augury for the Duke of Ulster's success in forming a powerful Administration, calculated to maintain the dignity and independence of the country in this hour of difficulty."

And so on. Final arrangements said to be not complete, but the Duke in communication with the leading men of both parties. Eminently satisfactory arrangement, says the public; man of great capacity, the Duke of Ulster, but this the first opportunity of developing it; and of a fine courage too, quality very needful at present crisis. Brave, but disposed to be rash, says Hottice (a great authority) at the clubs. Not so, replies Howtoss (another great authority); rashness the best prudence, perchance, in these times. Gratifying tribute to the claims of science, his appointment, say the men of science; but, alas! the great Calculus of the Unthinkable will now be never finished.

Gradually the details leak out, with more or less accuracy. Lord Grandison to take the Foreign Office, say the earlier rumours. Naturally, for who so fit? A trifle indolent perhaps, but firm when necessary, yet courteous withal, and proficient in knowledge of European affairs. But gout ever increasing interferes, and Lord Grandison, it is at length announced, is to accept seat in Cabinet without a portfolio, while Mr Braham takes the Foreign Office.

Mr Merrifield to be Chancellor of the Exchequer, with leadership in the House of Commons as aforesaid. Other noble lords take seats in Cabinet without office, for men are more abundant than places. Cabinet will become debating club and sort of fifth estate, grows the *Piccadilly*; Cabinet already too large. Which is true, but unavoidable. Leaders of both parties must be conciliated, and you cannot have all the talent of the country in the Government if any is left out.

So goes on the process of forming a strong Government. Other appointments are announced by degrees. Mr Sinnick to be Home Secretary. (Tommy should in no wise be left out, say both Hottice and Howtoss, at the clubs, if you want peace within.) Marquis of Tewkesbury, Secretary for the Colonies. Not practical enough, says Hottice, shaking his head; most clever beyond a doubt, but too impetuous, and will surely kick over the Government traces. Can't be helped, says Howtoss; Lord Tewkesbury a man by no means to be left out in the cold. Has definite opinions, too, not at all tending towards political effacement of England, and much in favour at present time. The Earl of Man takes India with general approval. So much sound sense invaluable to any Government, a somewhat too phlegmatic nature notwithstanding. Mr Carstairs to the Admiralty. A tribute to Manchester, observes Hottice; and to good sense and genial ways, adds Howtoss; Carstairs evidently the Premier of the future.

The Chancellorship a great difficulty, the present holder of the Great Seal being the acknowledged head of the profession, and much more than a mere lawyer to boot, while Lord Soffyste has great claims on his party, and is in every respect a man by no manner of means to be left out when good things are going. Proposal whispered about to put Great Seal in commission, and have virtually two Chancellors, for surely no care and expense should be spared to insure the Government being really a great united Government, and these are not times to stickle about economy. Difficulty eventually got over by proposed creation of new High Appellate Court, with one of the two noble lords to preside over it, while the other takes the Chancellorship. Quite enough work for a Chancellor, in these times, it was said, to lead the House of Lords and manage political business without sitting in a law court also; grave questions of international law arising daily which call for best attention of England's best jurist.

But even thus, say some grumblers of the late Opposition, will not your party have more than its share? How so? it is replied; do not you know that the Duke of Kingston is to be President of the Council, and that Hawthorne Sturdy takes the Board of Trade?—which answer is said to be truly satisfactory.

This, then, was the composition of the Government—Great United Government as it came to be called, and will be so handed down to history :—

First Lord of the Treasury, Duke of Ulster.

President of the Council, Duke of Kingston.

Lord Chancellor, Lord Soffyste.

Lord President of High Appellate Court with seat
in Cabinet [and *carte blanche* about law reform],
Lord Pilgrim.

Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the
House of Commons, Mr Merrifield.

Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Mr Braham.

Secretary for Home Department, Mr Sinnick.

Secretary for the Colonies, Marquis of Tewkesbury.

Secretary for India, Earl of Man.

First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr Carstairs.

President of the Board of Trade, Mr Hawthorne.
Sturdy.

Such were the principal appointments as finally arranged. Arrangements most judicious, say the press and the public: with so much talent and experience combined at the helm, England may face all dangers present and to come. Commanding majority in the House, says Hottice,—two hundred and fifty at least, so Glissereene told me himself. More like three hundred, replies Howtoss,—had it direct from Jasper Sumfute. [These two gentlemen were to be joint-secretaries to the Treasury.] No opposition left to speak of, in fact. Ah! there lurk the seeds of decay, both these gentlemen agree in prophesying; wheels will soon get rusty if there be no friction of opposition.

This ominous view, however, had so far become apparent only to experienced critics like my two friends. The public generally had nothing but admiration to offer for a Government so strong. But one appointment had still to be filled up—the War Office, and speculation was rife upon the subject. Lord Stowe will stop in, says rumour number one. Not so, says rumour number two; Lord Stowe too old, and in no case the man for Galway, whether Hibernian or otherwise. Not so, says Lord Stowe himself, after the matter is settled; his lordship tired of work and about to seek rest at Como with his dear Sophia and the rest of his daughters. Perkyman surely is to have the offer? Not so, again. Perkyman, it is thought, will claim to reopen Purchase question. Perkyman and Purchase in these times alike not to be thought of. Why not send Carstairs to Pall Mall, say the critics, and put the Admiralty into commission; or prevail on Neiland to take charge of it again? Neiland should really not be allowed to refuse office in this way. Or if lamented Thorowcome could only be prevailed on to return to public life and the War Office, all would be well; but medical opinion quite prohibitory. Buoyers also still ineligible for same reason. Who then shall it be?

A question much discussed at all clubs, and especially at the Union Jack. “Confound it,” said Julian Straight, late a brother officer, “whatever they do, I hope they won’t give us Buoyers for War Secre-

tary; he's a terrible fellow for pulling things about and making changes. I daresay he would be wanting to break up the old regiment."

"Well, we are a pretty big body," said Cobbe Smith, who was standing by.

"Not so very big; under five-and-thirty thousand, all told."

"Well, that's a tidy lot to have in one regiment; and if they add forty batteries more, as they talk of doing, we shall be over forty thousand; and who ever heard of a regiment of forty thousand men? The thing must break down, sooner or later, by its own weight."

"No difficulty whatever in managing it," said Colonel Murphy, "if you have an organisation by batteries, and make each battery a separate unit." Whereat the disputants separated.

"You must take quite an interest in all these War Office changes," said Peake of the Engineers, coming up stealthily as I stood by a side table turning over the magazines, while he made as if about to do the same—"you must take quite an interest in these things, having seen something of the inside working of the place. You were Paymaster-General once, were you not, or something of that sort?"

"Pity you left us," said Murphy, "pity you left us so soon. You might have stopped in with this new Government, and with a better chief than old Stowe, you might have done something. For my part, I

thought there was a good deal in your schemes. Pity you cooked your goose so completely by chucking up."

The papers meanwhile are discussing the Perkyman-Neiland hypothesis, one paper only suggesting that in these times the idea of a Parliamentary War Minister should be discarded, and a real soldier put in, Sir Roderick Baton, for example, or some other tried organiser of that sort. But the notice which had most interest for me was a little paragraph which appeared in my old friend the *Overseer*, at the end of several others announcing the various Ministerial appointments, with a ticket of commendation or the reverse in each case:—

"The War Secretaryship still remains undisposed of, the new Premier and his advisers being apparently in difficulty between the desire to fill it with an efficient man, and fear of leaving the beaten track. Lord Stowe is too slow, and Mr Buoyers is too ill and Mr Neiland is in a pet, so the list of eligibles is almost exhausted. Colonel West might prove to be the proper man in such an emergency, at any rate would be worth a trial, none of the younger politicians having made a mark in so short a time; but then he is not a duke, and is a colonel, and the last objection is, we suppose, a fatal one."

It would not do, of course, to write to the editor to say that I was not a colonel, or a military man of any rank; but the mistake was a provoking one under the circumstances.


CHAPTER LVII.

INVOLVES A THIRD APPEAL TO THE ELECTORS
OF LEATHERBY.

"Is Cincinnatus to be recalled from the plough? It will be a regular shame if he is not, although it seems almost too much good fortune to be possible. But I wonder you can sit there so quietly. Even I feel almost too excited to stop still for a minute. When do you suppose will the matter be decided?"

Thus spake a gentle voice, of a young lady sitting at fancy-work in a drawing-room, by Queen's Gate, to Cincinnatus, in an easy-chair, pretending to read a novel.

It is difficult to know what to do when ticketed off in this way. If some one, for example, says that you are like Julius Cæsar, to reply that you are not is merely to invite the other party to pursue the parallel, and to point out more particularly in what respects you resemble that famous person. It is perhaps better to be silent than to repudiate the compliment, and in the present case I could only reply



that I must certainly plead guilty to being a little curious on the subject, but did not expect the offer would now be made, if it ever had been intended to make it.


"Well," said Mary, "all I can say is, it will be a tremendous shame if they don't ask you. If they do not, all their talk about being in earnest to defend the country vigorously is a mere mockery."

"My dear Mary, it would indeed be a sad state of things for poor old England if everything turned on one particular man being secured for a Minister. Think of the mute inglorious Miltons and the possible Chathams and Pitts scattered over the country, serving behind counters, perhaps, for want of a chance. One's bootmaker or tailor may be a born organiser, only he has no means of showing it, yet the world wags, nevertheless. I do not deny thinking I could make a good job of the business if I had a chance, and such a chance will never occur again; but I have not been long enough in Parliament by twenty years. The world would be naturally shocked if one of 'Mr Merrifield's young men' were made a Cabinet Minister at a jump. But don't be afraid, there is plenty of talent available for organising the army if it is only made use of. Any respectable Minister will do, provided he will back up his subordinates and adopt their plans heartily. But I do hope they won't take on Lord Stowe again. That would indeed be making a farce of the whole business."

Thereon silence ensued, and I could not but smile inwardly to think that a man who had never been in the Cabinet, or even served in the Board of Treasury or the Home Office, or the Treasury, or been called to the Bar, and who suffered under the further disqualification of having been fifteen years in the army, should be gravely discussing his claims to the War Ministry; his confidant, who expressed herself so boldly, being a young girl fresh from the country, who had never spoken to a Minister but once in her life.

And yet, when just at this moment there was a ring at the street bell, I could not help connecting it with the matter in hand. There had been many rings during the day, as at other London houses, yet a mysterious prescience seemed to announce another turning-point in my life; and when the servant entered the room with a letter, I felt absolute disappointment to find that it did not bear the Duke of Ulster's signature. In the corner of the envelope, however, were the initials, J. G. M. The letter was from Mr Merrifield. It ran as follows :—

“MY DEAR MR WEST,—You are aware that the Duke of Ulster is engaged in forming an Administration, in which myself and several of my political friends have been invited, and have agreed, to act, together with Mr Braham and other of the leading members of the late Opposition. I venture to think



that, in the present critical state of affairs, it behoves all those whose services are of a sort to be calculated to be useful to the nation, and whose political opinions are not too completely opposed to the principles and aims of the new Government, to afford their co-operation, according to their several means and capabilities. Such have been the considerations which actuated myself and my friends in accepting office, under circumstances which would otherwise have rendered such a course extremely repugnant to our feelings. One of the Prime Minister's aims will be to undertake a revision of the defences of the country, with a view to placing them on such a footing of efficiency—possibly by augmentation of the forces, at any rate by such measures of improved organisation as may be appropriate to the occasion, bearing in mind, of course, the need for prompt action, and also that the constitution of the army should and must always be maintained in harmony with the spirit and practice of our political system, and bearing also in mind the need for maintaining such reasonable economy as may be practicable even in the present critical state of affairs—as shall be adequate to secure that degree of independence for ourselves, and justice for the claims of weaker nations, which, without undue interference in Continental affairs, must necessarily be a primary object with any Administration, more especially at the present time,—although, for my own part, I am still not without hopes that we

shall be yet spared the curse and misery of war,—which would command the confidence and support of the nation. The Duke having done me the honour to consult me, as well as others, on the formation of his Administration, and in consequence of my better acquaintance with you, has now requested me to say that it would afford him much satisfaction to learn that you would be prepared to give him your co-operation, in view to undertaking the duties, at this time peculiarly onerous and responsible, arising in connection with the supervision of the War Department.—Believe me, my dear Mr West, very faithfully yours,

“J. G. MERRIFIELD.”

I am not generally given to babble about official matters, but in the impulse of the moment I could not help handing the letter to my companion.

Mary read it with a flushed face and sparkling eye, and then, handing it back, said, with a bright sympathetic smile, “You see I was a true prophet. The Duke of Ulster will be more of a hero than ever in my opinion, now that he has shown himself so wise.”

“You think, then, I ought to accept?” I asked, rising from my chair, in which I had been watching Mary’s face while she read the letter, and standing before her.

“Ought to accept! Why, what else could you

be thinking of doing?" and Mary looked up wonderingly, while her smile changed to a more caustic expression.

"Well, don't you think that the arrangement is rather a strange one? If the Duke of Ulster wants me to join his Government, why doesn't he write himself, instead of sending a message by a third party? I don't suppose an offer of the kind was ever made in the same way before."

"It seems to me perfectly natural. You don't know the Duke of Ulster personally, I believe, and you know Mr Merrifield very well. What more natural than that the latter should be asked to write, especially by his own brother-in-law? No doubt he has been largely consulted by the Duke, and has pressed your claims."

"I should say not. You will observe he says nothing about his own opinions, but merely quotes the new Premier's."

"Surely that arises from delicacy of feeling. It would not have been pleasant to be told that the Duke had deferred to the writer's opinion against his own. Besides, the whole letter is redolent of Mr Merrifield's humility of character, which makes him all the more charming, I think. It is that perhaps which makes him a little indistinct."

"Yes, indeed. But that there can be only one post meant, I should fancy that something else was intended by these 'duties arising in connection with

the supervision of the War Department? Why couldn't he say the War Secretaryship at once? Then the silence about his own opinions is a little mysterious. It would be hopeless to attempt to carry any measure in a Government Merrifield belonged to, if he were against it."

"Men are funny creatures," observed Mary, drily, relapsing into her needlework. Presently, as I remained silent, she added, "But that I don't want to say anything that would put you on better terms with yourself just now, I should say that great men appear to have more than their share of petty vanity."

"At least they are not likely to fail from not being told their faults," I replied pettishly, and then turned to walk up and down the room, the letter in my hand. But although angry, partly at being lectured by this young lady, still more probably at having laid myself open to her penetration, I could not help being struck with the absurdity of the situation—that I, who two years ago was a penniless regimental officer, should now be pretending to myself to deliberate gravely whether to accept or not the offer which realised more than my wildest hopes had ever ventured to conceive, and this on account of a trifling departure from etiquette. Withal I could not help being amused at the notion of our guest, who had scarcely ever been out of Leatherby neighbourhood in her life, gravely discussing the intentions of past

and present Premiers as inferred from this mysterious letter.

But in a few turns of the room I recovered my temper, and exclaiming, "Yes, Mary, I am a goose, and what is worse, you have found it out," sat down at the table and replied to the letter.

"DEAR MR MERRIFIELD,—Understanding from your letter just received that the Duke of Ulster's Administration will enter upon office with the intention of making vigorous army reform a leading measure, and that this measure will also receive your unqualified personal support, I can have no hesitation in accepting the Duke's very gratifying offer, which you have done me the honour to communicate, of the charge of the War Department."

"I wonder what Eva will say when she hears of this change of fortune," I observed, when the note was finished and despatched. Eva had gone out to attend a committee of lady patronesses for a great charity ball on behalf of an oppressed nationality—oppressed nationalities were rather common just then—some refugees from which, then resident in London, were to be danced into the possession of a little food and clothes. "I wonder what Eva will say."

"Eva will be sure to be pleased at anything which pleases you." And Mary spoke gravely and in a tone almost of rebuke, as if implying that my re-

mark was intended to disparage my wife, and that she wished to check all such confidences.

To have explained that I had no such meaning, or any reservation in my remark, would have made matters worse. I could only remain silent, feeling that the rebuke might at any rate be fairly placed to the debit of old offences—bitter speeches made lightly, but which perhaps had the weight of frequency.

Eva came home shortly afterwards; and as she entered the room, dressed with the taste which adorned everything she wore, and flushed with the excitement of the committee meeting, I thought she had never looked more charming.

“There they are,” she exclaimed, placing a packet on the table, and throwing herself into an easy-chair; “each member of the committee has fifty vouchers to give away. Oh, Charlie, you ought to have been there to see how it was managed; the Duchess of Scarborough in the chair, and amendments, and resolutions, and rules, and all sorts of things, just as if we had all been members of Parliament. I am sure I don’t know what it was all about, but the Duchess made quite a little speech about the responsibility we must all feel to give away the vouchers carefully. I shall never know what to do with mine.”

“Get the Miss Stricklands to come and help you to make out a list. But now is an opportunity for securing the undying gratitude of our Leatherby

friends. Mrs Scrap would come up to town in a minute if you send her a voucher, and she might seize the occasion for bringing out Dulcibella." Dulcibella was the eldest Miss Scrap, *æt.* 17.

"Mr West, too, will stand in need of all his interests, now that he has to be re-elected," said Mary; "these vouchers come just at the right time."

I took this as a hint that I ought to be telling Eva the news, and that Mary feared I meant to keep it back, as to which, however, she was quite mistaken, but there had not been a moment for speaking sooner. However, I now broke in.

"I have a piece of news for you too, Eva. I am going to join the new Government in Lord Stowe's old place; head of the War Department, you know. Are you pleased, or sorry, Eva dear?" I continued, seeing that she remained silent, leaning back in her chair and looking up as if she hardly understood what was meant.

"Why, of course I am glad," answered Eva at last, "to see that you are so pleased, you dear ambitious old man;" and getting up, Eva put her hands on my shoulders in the old pretty way, and looking wistfully for a moment with her blue eyes into mine, gave me a kiss.

It was a long time since Eva had volunteered a kiss, and the little ceremony gave me a thrill of pleasure; but somehow the way in which she spoke threw a shade of sadness after it. She had often

called me an old man before, in fun ; but something in the tone of her voice seemed now to imply a sense of distance between us, unfelt in our earlier married days.

The *Dial* of that morning had contained a mysterious article regarding the vacant Secretaryship, to the effect that experience and tact were above everything else the qualifications needful for the post ; and that the country wanted "not so much a man great himself at organising, or who possesses a detailed knowledge of military affairs, as a statesman of varied experience who would give free play to the plans of his qualified advisers, with judgment to decide between conflicting schemes, and who would bring to the office the weight and authority conferred by rank and age."

"Seen the article in to-day's *Dial*?" said Tom Strickland—still, poor fellow, doing regimental duty—when he looked in that afternoon at the little house by Queen's Gate ; "Hottice, who pretends to know everything, says it is an inspired feeler, and that they are actually going to bring old Stowe in again. Howtoss, on the other hand, says the article refers to Thorowcome, and that he knows for a fact Sir Charles Digit and another physician have gone down to Shropshire to report whether he is fit for work again. But I won't believe it is to be old Stowe till I see it ; the thing would be too ridiculous. You

don't happen to know anything about it, I suppose?" he added, looking curiously at me.

I did not like to have a secret in the matter from my old private secretary, but could only remark that the article certainly looked as if inspired. Mary Drew meanwhile kept an unconcerned face; Eva was up-stairs in her room, resting after the fatigues of her committee labours.

Next morning the *Dial* had another article on the subject. The Duke of Ulster would best show the claims of his Government to deserve the confidence of the country, by obtaining for it the services of a body of Ministers with capacity adapted to the work in hand, and especially by judicious selection for the important charge of the War Department. These were not times for promotion by routine, and even the claims of long political service must give way to the exigencies of the occasion. No staff of permanent officials, however zealous and able, would suffice to carry out the great measures expected by the nation, unless the head of the Department himself possessed a marked capacity for organisation. The public therefore would learn with general satisfaction that the charge of the important branch of the public service had been intrusted to Mr West. Mr West, in his short career of office, brought lately to a close by an unfortunate misunderstanding, had given promise of the possession of this quality in an unusual degree, while the experience gained in the pro-

fession would be especially valuable in carrying out changes, the success of which mainly depended on care in the elaboration of details. And so on. The *Dial*, in short, patted both the Duke of Ulster and Mr West on the back, and as good as promised them its full support.

This was on a Friday. On Saturday the *Overseer* had its little paragraph on the subject, coming after a string of others about the new appointments. "Lastly, the appointment of Mr West [whom we called Colonel West last week inadvertently, having mistaken him for an officer of that name in the Marines] to the War Department shows that the Duke of Ulster means business. Mr West—young man with brains and experience, who yet does not think there is nothing like leather, and can speak without stammering—may very likely prove to be the born organiser the country has always been looking for. The new Government will do."

CHAPTER LVIII.

FIRST PUBLIC APPEARANCE OF THE NEW
COMPANY.

AS soon as the composition of the Great United Administration had been finally declared, Parliament was adjourned for a few days, while Ministers sought re-election. A simple matter in every case, constituencies being too much in earnest to allow even a show of opposition to the chosen of the country in these critical times; and especially simple in the case of the member for Leatherby, the electors of which snug little borough appeared to regard the whole affair as a providential interposition for providing a Cabinet Minister as their representative. At any rate even a visit to Leatherby was not necessary, and indeed few of the newly-appointed Ministers went down to see their constituents. Business could be pleaded as detaining them in town, and, in truth, minutes just now were worth the hours of ordinary times.

This popularity extended to all who were connected with the new Government; and my esteemed

colleague, Mr Sheepshanks, taking the opportunity of this crisis to surrender his seat on the score of age and health, Strickland (now a lieutenant-colonel, and back again of course at his old secretariat pursuits) presented himself as a candidate for the vacancy, and was returned with enthusiasm. "Mr Drew was invited, by some of the right-minded in politics, to come forward again," wrote Miss Fergusson from Leatherby to her friend Mary Drew, now our guest; "but he declared that nothing should induce him to be so foolish a second time, and indeed, it would have been quite useless trying; for when Colonel Strickland put forward as one of the claims to the suffrages of the good folks here, 'that he had already served an apprenticeship to public business under that distinguished statesman and true reformer, Mr West,' this left no chance for anybody else,—so papa says. Leatherby is generally pretty unanimous in politics, but never was seen such unanimity before; and the Stampton Court interest is now quite re-established here, thanks to the magic influence of Mr West's name. Doesn't Eva feel very proud about it?"

The elections and the adjournment came to an end together, and Ministers were able to take their seats on the first afternoon when the House reassembled. I was not there in time myself to see the earlier proceedings, which I afterwards heard were of an interesting sort. For there was a little natural awkward-

ness about the first start, especially as the House was very full, and every one eagerly watching the proceedings. Mr Sinnick, indeed, who was the first Minister to come in, took his seat on the Treasury bench without embarrassment, smiling to himself as if occupied with droll thoughts ; but when Mr Braham entered the House on the left of the chair, and made as if for his accustomed place, there was a momentary hush in the murmur of conversation, followed by a titter, which in turn was succeeded by a gratifying cheer, as the new Foreign Secretary, discovering his mistake, crossed over to the other side and sat down, bareheaded and with folded arms, a couple of feet below Mr Sinnick. There were still louder cheers when Mr Merrifield came in, and passed quickly to the Treasury bench, nodding to his friends, as they made way for him to pass between their legs and the table. The bench was now pretty full, only one or two gaps appearing here and there, and the leader of the House looked at them for a moment as if doubtful which to occupy ; but the hesitation was only momentary, and amid still louder cheers he plumped down between Mr Braham and Mr Sinnick, a sort of practical inauguration of the Great United Administration. Great indeed ; never had the Treasury bench been so full before, especially as very few of us could be called thin men ; two or three of the under-secretaries had no seats at all, but stood at the end, almost hid from observation by the Speaker's chair.

And the Treasury bench was as nothing to the right of the House. There was literally no room for the supporters of the Government, whose crowded state was rendered more striking from contrast with the other side, especially the empty condition of the front Opposition bench. No Opposition at all, in fact, to speak of; for Mr Perkymán and others, although not joining our party, promise a general support during the European crisis—a magnanimous resolution typified by appearance of Perkymán and others on the fourth row of Opposition benches.

No Opposition, therefore, to speak of; momentary abolition of party government, in truth, and Opposition and Treasury lions and lambs all lying down together, a truly edifying spectacle, and one never witnessed in Parliament before or since. “Ah, the Opposition will soon grow,” whispered a sagacious politician; “some worthy persons who ought to have been provided for are left out in the cold—a very pretty nucleus for opposition to collect around.” But indeed room could not be found for everybody, even in a Great United Administration. Four Crown lawyers, for example, can by no possible squeezing be fitted into two places. My old friend, Bracton, too, I grieved to see left out, although not perhaps generally mourned. He bore the disappointment, for his part, to outward appearance, with equal, not to say cynical mind. “There’s a dashed sight” [not quite *sic in orig.*], he observed to me that afternoon

in the lobby—"there's a dashed sight too many of you chaps to row in one boat for any time together. Old Merrifield may put on a spurt for a bit, but some of the crew will be catching crabs before long, or I'm a Dutchman; I'm precious glad I am out of the thing, I can tell you." Nevertheless, methought his open face looked a shade less jovial than usual among the crowd below the gangway, and a prophetic instinct whispered that perchance it might be seen before long on the other side.

But nothing could be more triumphant than our *début*. No man so quick as our leader to catch the tone of national feeling, no man so able to give it clear expression; and as Mr Merrifield, describing the formation of the Government, touched delicately, but with feeling, on the sacrifice made by our noble Premier in surrendering the elevating pursuits for which a life of leisure were all too short, and which should bring the undying fame not to be gained by any political success [this a graceful allusion to the great work unfinished—The Calculus of The Un-thinkable], had come forward at the call of duty to furnish the connecting link which should bind the two parties in one firm bond; as the orator, too, pictured in animated language the attitude of the country, opposing a united front to oppression and craft abroad, however and whenever manifested, and the determination of all Englishmen in this crisis to stand unanimous by each other; and as he went on

to state how the members of the new Government had been foremost in setting an example of magnanimity and self-sacrifice to their fellow citizens, almost in fact doing violence to their feelings by accepting office; then we occupants of the Treasury bench began to feel what true patriots we were, while the House by its acclamations gave a foretaste of the enthusiasm to be exhibited by the world out of doors. But the most telling point in our leader's speech occurred, quite accidentally, in his statement that the best guarantee for England exhibiting a dignified and honourable policy, was afforded by the fact that the management of her foreign affairs would be guided by the ripe judgment of the right honourable gentle—"I mean," said Mr Merrifield, correcting himself, "my right honourable friend," turning as he spoke and looking down upon the head of Mr Braham, who was next to him on the bench; whereat the statesman referred to, who was sitting sphinx-like and motionless, with his arms folded and head slightly bent down, responded by a slight bow, and at this graceful exchange of courtesies the cheers were taken up and repeated on all sides.

Slight signs of opposition indeed were not wanting, for as soon as Mr Merrifield sat down Mr Rigby Sebright—fast rising to be a minor power in the House—got up, and in a long set speech denounced us as an unrighteous coalition; an insinuation, how-

ever, which Mr Braham was considered to dispose of effectually in his famous reply. Not a coalition in any sense, said Mr Braham, rather a Constitutional Coalescence—a famous term, much bandied about afterwards, and since handed down to history. Mr Braham went on to justify our course by appropriate historical illustrations. Did not the Romans, patricians and plebeians, sink their smaller political differences in face of the invading Gauls? Did not the Greek republics, notwithstanding their normal hostility to each other, combine with success against the Great King? The barons, again, gave up their customary state of quarrelling to combine against King John. Lastly, where could be found a more appropriate illustration than in the Crusades, where all the leaders of chivalry, abandoning their usual diversion of knocking each other on the head (here the speaker could not resist a glance downwards at the head of his new colleague close by his own elbow), combined with more or less harmony against the newly-discovered foe? How much more, then, was it in accordance with principles of modern politics to combine against the dangers which now threatened the State? He denied, then, that this was a case of a coalition Government, rightly so called; it was rather what he had termed it, a Constitutional Coalescence.

Thus the Great United Administration is now fairly started. But the season waxes late, for all

these lately-described recriminations and negotiations and combinations and re-elections have not been effected without expense in time, and members ask ruefully if the jaded nation's representatives shall have no holiday this year? Truly a national crisis, they say, if Parliament sits through August, and moor-rent is to be paid for nothing. And yet a holiday is by no means to be thought of. Current business even has not been got through — votes, and appropriations, and estimates, and so forth; and there still remains the European crisis to be dealt with afterwards. These, then, are no times for holidays, and no true patriot should ask for them; still it is thought members may shoot their grouse, and even early partridge, without detriment to public weal. But pheasants shall have their holiday this year; Parliament, in fact, is to break up in mid-August, and meet again before October. The Administration will then have got its measures ready, and will take the nation into its confidence.

CHAPTER LIX.

ARRANGEMENTS, MINISTERIAL AND DOMESTIC.

FOR Ministers themselves, of course, neither grouse nor salmon are to be thought of, save for dinner; nor even visits to the country. Jaded ministerial frames may be refreshed at most by suburban air in proximity to convenient morning and evening trains: for every public office needs the constant presence of its head; despatch-boxes are in course of perpetual delivery, like baker's bread in the morning; and Cabinet Councils are held every day. The Duke of Ulster accordingly took a country house for the autumn weeks at Barnet, and Mr Merrifield one on Wimbledon Common; while Mr Braham, who declared that the air of Piccadilly in September was unsurpassed for freshness at any time of the year, remained in his town house in Plantagenet Square.

For the War Secretary, on whom the greatest pressure came, even a suburban residence was not to be thought of, although I confess to casting a wistful look at my uncle's old house at Twickenham, which

happened to be vacant just now. But as the little establishment by Queen's Gate seemed hardly suitable to our altered circumstances, the recess offered fitting opportunity for a move. The difficulty was how to make it. Changing your house involves choosing a new one, with the accompaniments of furnishing, selecting servants, and other time-engrossing details hardly within the compass of a newly-appointed Minister during a European crisis ; yet at the prospect called up by the preliminary discussion Eva appeared so distraught, that it became evident there was one piece of very precious household furniture at any rate which would require moving with particular care, nor was it plain how to effect the transfer compatibly with other engagements. But in this predicament our young guest came to the rescue. The difficulties which appalled Eva, and by reflection bewildered her husband, were made nothing of by Mary, who seemed to possess a natural genius for domestic administration ; and Mr Crouch, the junior partner of my old friend and agent Mr Pater-son, having secured for us a furnished house in Tudor Gardens, which as every one knows are contiguous to Plantagenet Square, the operation of moving became greatly simplified. This eligible town mansion, as the house-agent styled it, belonged to a gentleman engaged in financial operations which it was understood the European crisis had temporarily deranged, involving retirement to Brighton for a season, and

break-up of London establishment. "Furnished houses are not economical," said Mr Paterson, "but it may be convenient in your case,"—meaning, no doubt, that it might be convenient to have the means of retreating from the more expensive style of living now in contemplation in the event of sudden political downfall ; but my shrewd old friend possibly guessed that other reasons rendered a minimum of trouble desirable.

The new house had been furnished with the splendour befitting a man who made money easily, and might have to part from it with the same facility, being almost too magnificent for a simple Secretary of State with a moderate independence ; and I felt painfully conscious that our surroundings would be quite in keeping with the character of a political upstart, if people should so dub me, and that anybody judging of the mistress by the house might set down my gentle guileless Eva for a *nouvelle riche*. But in truth the economy of the arrangement was its attraction, for the house was a bargain, and while containing handsome reception-rooms of the conventional size, was otherwise small enough to need only a small establishment. This was important, for in fact money matters were not very prosperous. If a man, blessed with a charming but unpractical wife, is too busy or preoccupied to look after his household expenditure, but lets things take their course, and is above everything anxious to be regarded as a liberal

member by his constituents, making up by liberal subscriptions for his absence ; if, further, he contents himself with paying the bills that are sent in, but omits to make any provision for those which are not sent in, he will probably find that the latter are apt to accumulate in a rather embarrassing degree. This had happened in our instance, or rather in mine, for Eva was happily unconscious of the state of the case ; and the result was, that the examination into my affairs which the late interval of leisure rendered possible, showed that notwithstanding the addition to my private means of an official income which I had enjoyed for a good many months, I was considerably worse off than when we first settled in London. This knowledge, and the pressure of unsettled bills—that for the famous picture of Eva, by Deedes, R.A., which attracted so much attention at the last Academy Exhibition, was among the largest—did not conduce, by the way, to my peace of mind during that enforced vacation, and would have explained to Eva, had she known the cause, the irritability which I fear I sometimes exhibited at that season of inaction.

“ At any rate, my dear sir,” said Mr Paterson, when we talked the matter over, “ don’t touch your capital, whatever you do. Keep your seventy thousands intact ; once trench on that and you will never make it good again. We can raise the money for a short term under the arrangement I propose for paying

off these liabilities at once, for in your new position it would be hardly becoming to have any tradesmen's debts outstanding ; but meanwhile, until the debt is liquidated, you will be poorer by some hundreds a-year. And the worst is yet to come. If you have found it difficult to live on your income hitherto, it will be much worse now that you have become a big man. Everybody says that the salary of a Secretary of State does not cover his expenses."

"It is usual to say so, I know ; but I can't see why it should be so. The only extra expense involved seems to be a certain amount of entertaining and so forth. But you may give a good many dinners for five thousand a-year. We have made a bad beginning, I admit, but I will be more careful for the future. I don't want to save on my salary, but I must make it do."

Thus the house at Tudor Gardens, albeit somewhat too spick and span, not to say gaudy for our tastes, was otherwise suitable enough ; and on the arrangement being concluded, Mary Drew proceeded to engage a fresh staff of domestics—Annette, Eva's little maid whom she had brought from Leatherby, being the only member of the establishment whom we intended to take with us to the new house—including a housekeeper of intensely respectable appearance and high testimonials, whose accession to our household gave promise of domestic comfort hitherto unknown to it. Let me add here that the expectation was fully

realised. This good lady, who occupied some dungeon-like apartment on the basement, never within my observation emerged therefrom, save when once a-month she presented herself in the library to deliver her account and receive her cheque. Nevertheless her influence seemed to permeate the whole household, and under her plutonian rule a cycle of peace and good order was entered on, inexpressibly comfortable to its master during the coming busy days, when to be sure of a punctual meal was an object of moment.

In making these arrangements Mary professed to be merely helping Eva, excusing herself for taking part in them on the score of her wish to save the latter from fatigue ; but it was easy to infer from the conversation at dinner about the proceedings of each day that Eva's share had been mainly confined to looking on, while Mary did the work. The general result was that in a few days all our arrangements were completed, and when the time came for Mary's return home, there remained nothing for Eva to do but to allow herself and Annette to be conveyed to Tudor Gardens on the day appointed for the change, about a fortnight later, where the housekeeper and her new establishment would be waiting to receive us.

Eva was very wishful that her friend should stay a little longer, if only, as she put it, to help her in facing the new housekeeper, protesting that without

such countenance it would be impossible ever to summon up courage to give her any orders. But Mary was obliged to bring her visit to a close; for the Squire—the poor-rates having taken a turn downwards lately—had invited some friends for the autumn shooting, and wanted his daughter to help to entertain them. And indeed, but for recollecting that the Squire had managed to get along very well by himself for the last ten years, we should hardly have felt justified in pressing her to extend her visit even till September; but the value to us of her presence gave a tinge of selfishness to our hospitality.

“You will put it down to the right motive, I know, Mary,” I said on the morning of her departure, “if I don’t offer to see you off at the station?”

“See me off? I should be miserable all the way down to Leatherby if you were to do such a thing. Fancy a Minister, with all the affairs of the nation on his hands, escorting young ladies to railway stations!”

“Ministers are not really more busy than other people who have their time fully occupied, and a man must be a bad manager who can’t find an hour to spare, be he who he may. But it isn’t that. I happen to have an appointment for that particular time. But you won’t think it priggish of me to say so; other people might. It is selfish, no doubt,” I added, “but I wish the Squire could have spared you till we had settled into our new house. Eva will be a

little lost in it at first, and very lonely without you."

"Yes, I am afraid it will be lonely; and you too will be away from home now more than ever, I suppose?"

"I shall try and do as much work at home as possible. Now that I am to have a decent *sanctum* upstairs, instead of that dingy back dining-room, Strickland and I shall be able to get through a good deal comfortably at home." For Tom Strickland, although now an M.P., was to continue in his office of private secretary.

"Is it usual," asked Mary, looking down, and speaking apparently with some hesitation—"is it usual for private secretaries to work in this way at the Minister's house? I thought they were usually appointed from the clerks of the office, and did all their business there."

"Yes, I believe such is the usual plan, and I have two such secretaries at the office; but Colonel Strickland is an extra man, and besides, I think we have improved on the conventional system. It seems to me that most men in office don't half utilise their secretaries."

"Well," said Mary, "if I were you I should stick to the usual plan." She said this with an air of conviction, as if she had been thinking over the matter.

"Why, Mary, you are becoming a critic indeed; you will soon be as great an administrator as Sir Mordaunt Burley. What should make you think of

such a thing?" I said this, perhaps, in a tone of pique; for much as I appreciated her capacity for business and her sympathy with my pursuits, this seemed going a little too far. But I regretted it immediately, and turned the conversation on observing that she was blushing, and looked confused, and even pained; and as I walked down to Pall Mall after her departure, my thoughts returned to the conversation, and I wondered what might be the cause for this exhibition of feeling. Could Strickland have annoyed her? or was it prompted by a different sentiment? Certainly he seemed to pay her somewhat formal attention, and during the earlier part of her visit a good deal of lively banter used to pass between them whenever he came to the house; but of late she had appeared to exhibit a certain amount of reserve in his presence, relieved occasionally by sallies in which there came out a tone as of scorn or displeasure. In fact, now I thought over the matter, it had been noticeable even to my superficial observation that she appeared somewhat constrained in his company, and I could not help speculating whether this might not be a manifestation of maiden coyness, and thinking that Strickland was just the man to appreciate a clever wife, and that the Squire's land, which bordered the Stampton Court estates on one side, would make a very handsome addition to them.

CHAPTER LX.

PRIVATE REHEARSAL BY THE NEW COMPANY.

IT was not without a certain feeling of bashfulness that I had re-entered the establishment in Pall Mall in my new capacity, an event which occurred about three weeks before the departure of our young guest recorded in the last chapter. The reception accorded by the messengers, indeed, was reassuring, for these good fellows received me with an easy respect, born of habit. A change of heads was too common a phenomenon in the office to excite any surprise, and with them one Secretary of State was pretty much the same as another, any differences in the official performances of these personages being too insignificant a matter to come under their notice. These worthy officials had the handling of too many papers to feel any curiosity about their contents, being in this respect like the grocer's apprentice who is allowed a surfeit of sweets on admission to the craft; and state secrets of highest import could be carried about from room to room, with almost certainty

that the bearers would not be at the trouble of looking into them. I think if my friends had any preference it would be for a peer, especially a high one, an earl or a marquis being considered to confer a certain amount of prestige on the office, whereas the office conferred it upon a commoner; but this is merely an inference. Nothing of the sort could be guessed from the easy respect with which I was conducted to my new apartment, the roomy chamber hitherto associated with my assaults upon Lord Stowe's leisure, and the stormy discussions held round the long table at the end.

Happily the embarrassment of taking over charge from that statesman personally was avoided, as he had gone off to Italy the moment my appointment was made known, in view to spending the winter in Rome with Lady Sophia and the rest of his daughters. Sir Frederic Baton, the chief of the Staff, was also absent, nursing his gout at Buxton, which was also convenient in one sense, for there is no doubt a certain awkwardness in a meeting of this sort, as I felt indeed in the first interview with Burley and the rest of my old friends. One must be careful to avoid anything like the semblance of triumph; and yet the effort to be simple and unaffected may appear artificial, where previous relations had been such as ours. Thus I was conscious of being a little nervous when stepping into Burley's room, which I did a few minutes after entering the office.

I found that official surrounded as usual by a hecatomb of boxes and baskets of papers, while bundles of letters and minutes and piles of blue-books littered his table; and glancing round I thought I could detect the celebrated bread-and-beef chart, rolled up and enjoying an honourable repose on a sofa in the corner.

"How do you do, Sir Mordaunt Burley?" said I, advancing behind the messenger into the room.

"Bless me!" said Burley, jumping up and taking off his spectacles to give them a wipe, "how do you do, Mr West; I was just going to wait upon you, sir," he added with a bow; "I did not know you had arrived." Then we both sat down.

"Busy as ever, Sir Mordaunt, I see"—at which remark Burley glanced round at his boxes and baskets with a modest smile. "Well, business is not likely to decrease just now; we have plenty of work cut out for all of us."

"You have a great task before you, indeed, Mr West—a great task," he replied.

I did not know at first whether Burley meant this as implying that he washed his hands of me and my measures, or as a modest deprecation of any assumption of authority on his part. I therefore went on.

"A great work before all of us. But we have the satisfaction of knowing that we shall be supported out of doors in everything we do; the times have

cleared the ground for us. And any diffidence I might feel in undertaking my share of the task is a good deal diminished by what I know of the power of this office for work and the loyal co-operation it always gives to the person who may happen to be at the head of it."

"That you may depend on having, Mr West ; that you may depend on having. It is a great task this, and for my part I may say that I freely recognise your claim to the first place in carrying it out. And you will have great help in the office—great help ; there is great knowledge here, and great experience ; and for my part, I believe our views are all very much agreed. I was certainly very greatly impressed with those you put forward. It was very unfortunate you left us when you did, so much time has been lost. However, we can all set to work now."

I was pleased with old Burley's hearty offer of co-operation, although not very sure about the assumed accord of ideas ; however, it was a great point to have thus re-established on an amicable footing my relations with the leading man. The ice once broken, matters soon settled down, and before a week had passed the sense of strangeness had passed away too, and as far as feeling went, one might have been at the head of the office for a decade.

Nor, indeed, was this a time to approach the business coyly. Every hour was of consequence, and every minute given to preliminaries so much time

wasted. Nothing for it but to plunge into the matter, and set about giving immediate practical effect to the measures already advocated. To delay while over-refining might ruin the country, while never could an aspirant for serving it as effective administrator wish for better opportunity. Practical *carte blanche* given as to details; but various questions of general policy must first be brought before the whole Government, the largest being whether or not compulsory military service should be established; a grave question to be discussed in Cabinet Council held on the first day of Ministry being finally made up.

I must confess that the nervousness of which I was conscious upon the morning in question, on re-entering the establishment in Pall Mall, was slight compared with what I felt that afternoon, on walking for the first time up the dingy staircase of the old house in Downing Street. And yet, if the sensations came to be analysed, it would be difficult to account for them. Nothing could be more plain, not to say mean, than the surroundings of the meeting, while many of the *dramatis personæ* were the same as one was accustomed to perform with daily at Westminster; and I record these impressions merely because first impressions soon wear off and are difficult to recall. I remember feeling very nervous when first spoken to in the street by Mr Merrifield two years before. And although the same sensation was again uppermost on this occasion, it also soon wore off.

The air of the place was indeed of a sort to dissipate such a feeling. The Ministers who had already arrived were standing about the room talking in little groups, joined by the others as they came in one by one.

"Are we all here?" said the Duke of Ulster at last, when the apartment resembled the anteroom at a public dinner, except that no one looked hungry.

"Everybody, I think," replied Lord Tewkesbury, "except Tardy, and he, of course, is late." Whereupon everybody laughed at Lord Tardy, although the only point of the joke seemed to lie in its being made behind his back.

"Well, perhaps we had better not wait for him," said the Duke, taking his seat at the table; "suppose we go to business,"—and we all followed his example.

The members of the Great United Administration who had seats in the Cabinet being unusually numerous, there was hardly sitting-room round the table, and it struck me as taking off from our natural sense of dignity that we should be, so to speak, arranged in chequered fashion, some close to the table, and others further off, and all sitting a little sideways in order to find room. Nevertheless, when—after a certain amount of miscellaneous talking, and after Mr Braham had read out a deeply interesting telegram just received from the special envoy in the north—the Duke, turning to me, asked me to state the points I had to bring before the Council, I con-

fess to having again felt a considerable nervousness, plainly expressed, I am sure, in my voice ; the more so as I was sitting some way from the Premier, and the room was a very bad one for sound ; still more, perhaps, from feeling that probably some of the noble lords present were disposed to regard my appointment rather unfavourably, as that of a political youngster promoted out of his turn. European crisis, these gentlemen might think, makes us acquainted with strange bedfellows. And to a certain extent I could sympathise with them, for I felt that I had not won my spurs yet, and that they might fairly say my appointment was one of Mr Merrifield's eccentric selections.

But the sensation created by these misgivings soon wore off as, after I had finished my brief statement, a hubbub arose of general conversation. My first proposal was to reconstitute the appointment of Commander-in-Chief, detaching his office and establishment entirely from that of the War Minister. Surely a step backwards, said some ; circumlocution, divided responsibility, and all the rest of it reintroduced ; Mr Thorowcome's labours all thrown away. Not at all, it was argued in reply. What you want is that everybody should be responsible for his own duties, not that one man should be responsible for the duties of everybody else. It is not the business of the War Minister to command the troops : he ought simply to supervise the administration of the army. This

piling up of all functions, executive and ministerial, upon one man, is simply to introduce confusion under the guise of simplicity. You relieve others of responsibility, while the Minister, from the nature of the case, can only be responsible in name. This pursuit which has been going on after so-called unity of administration arises from a complete confusion of ideas. The old state of things was faulty in this way, that the Commander-in-Chief was kept at a distance, while all the other departments of the army were brought into the War Office, so that the former was liable to be criticised and overruled at every point by the perfectly irresponsible understrappers who surrounded the War Minister and acted in his name. The result was not only that the branches of army administration thus personally represented at the War Office got to have undue influence; but that they were allowed to interfere inordinately, under the pretence of exerting financial control, with the executive business of the army, with which properly they had nothing whatever to do. There was hardly a conceivable question submitted by the Commander-in-Chief upon which Sir Mordaunt Burley or his predecessors did not manage to have their say, so that the power and responsibility of the former as executive head of the army were being continually encroached upon and absorbed in the office in Pall Mall. But the true remedy for that state of things was not to absorb the Commander-in-Chief too. The

proper course is to place all the departments on the same footing ; put them all outside the War Department as separate establishments, define the duties of each, and make the head of it distinctly responsible for their performance. The War Minister then becomes what his name imports, a ministerial officer instead of an executive one ; nor will you ever have the army properly governed till this relation is established. But, above all, you can't govern an army without a responsible Commander-in-Chief—responsible not only for the discipline of the troops, but whose opinion should be recorded on every matter relating to the army, as that of the person presumably most competent to give it. Equipment, armament, fortifications, everything ; the recommendations of the chief military adviser should be officially recorded on every proposal, while it rests with the Secretary of State to take his advice or not, as he thinks fit. In this way only will you have a real partition of responsibility. Then the authority of the Government and Parliament, as represented by the Minister, will come in at the proper point. And whenever Parliament calls for information in regard to any branch of army business, there will thus be forthcoming a complete record of the case, and responsibility for their respective shares in the transaction can be fixed on each party concerned. Let the Minister judge and decide, but let the expert propose first and execute afterwards. Establish real responsibility.

This was the gist of what was said, but not in quite such categorical form. These views were unfolded as it were by snatches amid the general conversation, and very much in the form of question and answer. But it seemed that the idea was generally acceptable, although not altogether understood. One old lord especially, who had been a Cabinet Minister off and on for the last forty years, and was now one of several who had a seat without a portfolio, and who was very deaf, went off at a tangent.

"I object altogether to over-centralising in this way," he bawled across the table. "I object——"

"But," interrupted Mr Carstairs, who sat next to him, "this is not a proposal of the——"

"Yes," he went on in the same tone, not being aware probably how plainly we all heard him, "I think this over-centralising very dangerous. I object altogether to abolishing the office of Commander-in-Chief. I remember when the Duke of Wellington——"

"But," persisted Mr Carstairs in a very loud voice, "this is a proposal for reappointing a Commander-in-Chief, not for abolishing him."

"Oh!" said the old peer, "ah, I understand—very good;" and nodding his head several times, as if scoring off the point in his mind, he relapsed into silence.

"And what do you propose as the new tactical unit?" asked the Duke of Scarborough across the table, also a Minister without a portfolio, and who,

as a colonel of volunteers, was a great military authority.

"That is a point for the head of the army to determine, as soon as one is appointed. My business, as I conceive, is to find him the troops, and his to drill them."

"I don't know about that," said the Duke, doubtfully. "Everything in war depends nowadays on having the right tactical unit. See what Von Ordnung says about it in his last work. I am all for double company columns in echelon of half-battalions, with skirmishers rallying on each flank, myself. I certainly think it ought to be made a Cabinet question. Think where we should be if we went to war with a wrong tactical unit!"

The question of forced or free service afforded still more discussion. Every one was agreed that we must have the means of raising a large army, and that at once; but opinions were divided whether to establish forced service, or to continue trusting to voluntary enlistment,—a ticklish question no doubt, and one about which a good deal had to be said. I proposed to retain the voluntary system, at any rate to give it a further trial with the new inducement of increased pay in the reserve, and various other attractions which I had not the opportunity of mentioning in detail; but others thought that this would be a half-measure. And to my surprise Mr Merrifield seemed keener than anybody on this side, urging

with much vivacity and point that it was quite as paramount a duty for the citizens of a free state to share in its defence as to contribute to the taxes, and that it would be folly, indeed almost a crime, to lose the opportunity afforded by the present state of national enthusiasm and indignation, for enforcing so sound a political maxim. No definite decision, however, was arrived at; and after a good deal more of miscellaneous talk, the council broke up.

"You really ought to see what Von Ordnung says about proper tactical units," said the Duke of Scarborough to me as we went down-stairs together. "I must send you my copy of his last pamphlet on the subject, the 'Ueber die fortschreitende Entwicklung der neuen Schwärmcolonnen mit besonderer Berücksichtigung,' and so forth. I will send you Captain Colledge's translation: 'On the moral influence of the employment of the new swarm columns considered with particular regard to the development of national unification and also of flank attacks.' It is quite a short thing, so I hope you will find time to look into it. He is a great authority on these points is Von Ordnung; I am sure you will be struck with some of his ideas."

"A very satisfactory beginning," said Mr Braham, in whose company I was walking home after the meeting, for our roads lay the same way. "A satisfactory beginning. You will now be able to set about your great measures with confidence."

"Satisfactory enough, certainly," I replied, "so far that there was little or no opposition, and every one seemed to be impressed with the need for action; but otherwise we have come away no wiser than we went. I confess to being quite in the dark as to what conclusions we have arrived at, or indeed whether we are supposed to have arrived at any. It seemed to me to have been all talk, and no business. A parish vestry could not have been less methodical." And I looked in my companion's face as searching for an answer.

Mr Braham smiled mysteriously. "Did you expect it to be otherwise?" he replied. "All Cabinets talk; ours will be distinguished in that way from force of numbers—an inherent condition, surely, when a lot of men meet who never come together except on these occasions. Besides, you must make allowance for Seenecks and the rest, who have no governmental functions, and no opportunity of showing they belong to the Government, except by talking at these meetings. Surely no one would wish to baulk them of so harmless a diversion." Mr Braham himself, I should mention, had not made a single observation during the whole time.

"Very proper, no doubt; only I should like to know what it is the Government collectively decides upon doing."

"The Government collectively," said Mr Braham, sententially, "never decides upon doing anything.

These councils are useful for keeping everybody informed of what is going on; and individuals may, no doubt, inhale a certain spirit of wisdom which pervades, as by inspiration, the collective body ; but at the most you can only find out, on these occasions, what can *not* be done."

"Still, I presume a Minister is not quite supreme and uncontrolled in his department? The existence of a collective Government is surely not a mere political fiction?"

"That depends on the nature of the particular question involved. If Carstairs wants to abolish the game laws, for example, he will have to make quite sure of his colleagues before introducing his measure. But when Palmerston was at the Foreign Office he was quite uncontrolled—'*l'Angleterre c'était lui*,' so far as kings and kaisers were concerned. Our insular nation is always satisfied to leave its foreign policy to the Minister, when it has confidence in him, and he has confidence in himself." And Mr Braham smiled solemnly, as if he thought that happy state of mutual confidence was realised at the present time.

"Yes, I can understand that," I answered ; "but still the difficulty may often arise in knowing where to draw the line. And you will readily understand," I added, after a pause, "that, being so young a Minister, I feel a hesitation in appearing to take more on myself than is justifiable. Besides, it seems to me that army reform comes under the same cate-

gory as the game laws. Nothing excites so much general interest, because nothing touches so much the public of all classes. Army reforms always involve personal questions, and personal questions arouse the feelings more than any others."

"True; but, nevertheless, you must not take up every little question to the Cabinet, or if you do you must not expect to have it answered. When I first came into office as Home Secretary, and comparatively a young man, I began by making just this mistake. No; your plan is clear. You must consult the Duke of Ulster, of course, and freely, and get his concurrence to all measures of importance. Then war and foreign affairs go together a good deal just now, and it is just as well that what is done may be, so far as practicable, in accordance with the general feelings of what used to be the Opposition party. Perhaps," continued Mr Braham, smiling again, "I should be able to give you as useful hints as anybody on this head; at any rate I shall be happy to confer with you at all times. Then, as Merrifield has to find the money for your plans, it would be well to carry him with you. In fact, you would not be able to do much with Merrifield in opposition, whether in the Cabinet or out of it. Happily you have got a warm backer in him."

"Yes, he has always given me a most generous support; but although I saw he was gradually coming round to new views on the subject, I was

certainly astonished to find him this afternoon so much more thoroughgoing than anybody else. Fancy Merrifield, of all men, advocating a conscription."

"Yes ; but there ought to be nothing surprising about it to those who have watched his career. Merrifield is always for running into extremes. No two men, of course, are so unlike as the same man at different times ; but Merrifield has undergone this metamorphosis more than once, and I don't despair of seeing 'our John' settling down finally into a steady-going old Tory."

This, of course, was mere exaggeration, pardonable, perhaps, as coming from Mr Braham. As we parted at the end of the Park to pursue our different roads home, I could not help again recollecting that only a few months had passed since my first conversation with the great Minister, now so lightly spoken of, and my nervousness on the occasion. It seemed like a dream that in so brief a space we should be fellow-ministers, with "Brammy" for a colleague. Verily, truth is stranger than fiction. And reflecting how largely my sudden rise was due to his unaffected kindness and patronage, I felt guilty of something like treachery at having discussed his character so lightly, and that with a comparative stranger like Mr Braham. But the tendency manifested in all cultivated society of people to talk about their friends behind their backs, extends even to these exalted circles. Cabinet Ministers, I found, seemed always

to have an irresistible inclination to discuss the merits of their colleagues. I observed, too that the criticism mostly took a depreciatory form, the verdict being generally to the effect that So-and-so was decidedly going off, and not at all the same man that he used to be in Opposition.

CHAPTER LXI.

OPENS A SECRET DRAWER WITHIN THE CABINET.

THE Duke of Ulster represented a family long time distinguished in Irish history, but which first became famous in the person of Patrick O'Neale, Earl of Ulster, one of the stanchest supporters of the Stuarts, and whose stubborn resistance to Cromwell is matter of history familiar to every schoolboy. O'Neale finally vanquished, his head was of course cut off; but his son returning from exile at the Restoration, was made a marquis and Lieutenant of Ulster, when he naturally in turn took the opportunity afforded by his position to get the heads cut off of such of his neighbours as had been on bad terms with the family. So loyal a nobleman, it needs hardly be said, took sides with King James the Second against the Dutch usurper, and was among the most gallant of the losing commanders at the battle of the Boyne. After the Jacobite cause was finally overthrown in Ireland, he followed his royal master into exile, and died at Versailles. On the accession of Queen Anne the sen-

tence of attainder on the son was annulled, and the estates restored to the family. With these reverses the house of O'Neale seemed to have learned prudence ; for although the third marquis was suspected of being in communication with the Pretender, and to have arranged a rising in the north of Ireland during the '45, a certain amount of caution had mingled with his naturally hot Irish blood, and the head of it holding back to see the upshot of the Highlanders' march into England before finally committing himself, the great house of O'Neale escaped another political downfall.

The fourth Marquis, who succeeded to the title in 1750, carried his great fortunes to London, and becoming a stanch Hanoverian was very instrumental in his old age in carrying the Union—service rewarded by Pitt with the garter, a dukedom, and an English peerage, although he still continued to be known as 'The O'Neale' by his Celtic tenantry. It was the first duke who built the gloomy palace known as Ulster House, the picture-gallery of which is adorned with Gainsborough's famous picture of the beautiful duchess. (She was a Mac Murrough.)

The present head of the family had come to the title unexpectedly on the death of his uncle, the fourth duke, and had been brought up in seclusion, studying metaphysics and science at a German University, until called home just as he came of age to the family honours and estates. But those who

expected that this plan of education, so unusual for the heir to a dukedom, would unfit him for sustaining the political position of the family, were agreeably disappointed. Science and philosophy were still the young duke's favourite pursuits; but he soon displayed a readiness of speech and a power of argument in the House of Lords which, joined with his mastery of all Irish subjects, secured him at once a leading position there. As a matter of course the Duke of Ulster became a Cabinet Minister, whenever his party were in, but it was understood that the office allotted to him should always be one of the easy posts, and that he would take the work of it easily. But although devoting his attention mainly to congenial pursuits, no man could be more certainly depended on when occasion arose for the service of his party; and his reputation for oratory was rapidly built on the slashing speeches delivered on political emergencies with true Hibernian fire and spirit—Hibernian fire which perhaps sometimes carried the orator even beyond the necessities of the case. All agreed that the great Irish dukedom was never more worthily filled, and a general regret was felt that the family would probably end with himself. The Duke had married early, and being left a childless widower, showed no intention of marrying again. Sad to think that so great a line should become extinct, said his friends and the public. Better so, said the Men of Science; the Duke woos

Science ; Science the most charming but exacting of brides. But even so fair a lady must be jilted when the country in throes of European crisis calls out for a statesman to guide it ; and the Duke, not it was thought without a longing look backward, came forward at the call of duty to furnish the only practicable solution of the political difficulty. Gratifying testimony to our merits, said the Men of Science ; but alas, the great Calculus of The Unthinkable will now never be completed !

Whatever might be the loss to science, an ardent departmental Minister could not have wished for a chief better fitted to help him in his great administrative project, the Premier giving hearty support without showing any wish to interfere in details ; and accordingly the final arrangements were soon decided on for carrying out the general scheme of army reorganisation which I had in view, and were finally approved at a consultation held a few days after the Cabinet Council already mentioned, and in which Mr Merrifield and Mr Braham took part.

This scheme provided for the constitution of the different army departments as separate establishments in the manner already explained, viz. :

The Commander-in-Chief and Army Headquarters.

Pay and Audit Department under Accountant-General.

Store Department, under Inspector-General, a general officer of artillery ; divided into a manufac-

turing branch, and the supply branch or magazines. These magazines to be in charge of artillery officers, and to contain all military stores, as well as ordnance and ammunition.

Commissariat Department, under Commissary-General, for food and forage, and having the Army Transport Corps attached to it in peace time.

Works Branch, under Inspector-General of Fortifications.

Medical Department.

The War Department proper to consist of the Secretary and two Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State (one in each House), a permanent Under-Secretary, and the needful staff of clerks for corresponding with these different departments.

"The arrangements seem simple enough," observed Mr Merrifield ; " but I miss the professional element in the War Office. How are these Parliamentary officials to work the machine if you remove all the experts ? "

"The professional adviser will be the Commander-in-Chief. He will be responsible for the advice he offers ; the Minister will be responsible for acting on it, or not acting on it. In this way you have a complete distribution (not division) of responsibility."

"And how as to the conflict of departments about which one hears so much ? " said the Duke. "Will not this be intensified if they are all working apart from each other ? "

"There should be no such conflict where all are subject to one central authority. It arises now, because no one can say whose advice is given, or whose is taken ; and the parties who should be responsible are liable to be overridden by those who are wholly irresponsible. Take the late manoeuvres for example. No sooner was it determined to have manoeuvres of some sort, than everybody connected with the War Office thought it necessary, as the phrase goes, 'to shove his oar in ;' and there were proposals, and counter-proposals, and minutes, and memorandums, and consultations, and Lord Stowe was pulled this way and that, and there was as much fuss and bother as might have sufficed to despatch a hundred thousand men abroad. Now what would happen under my plan would be this. The Minister would tell the Commander-in-Chief what sum was provided, and the latter would thereon draw out his scheme for the application of the sum. The Minister's share in the matter would then be limited to satisfying himself that the vote would not be exceeded, and thereon sanctioning the scheme."

"Still," said Mr Merrifield, "as I understand your scheme, you have left the Secretary of State without a single expert in the office, for the permanent Under-Secretary may be a civilian. Is not that rather overdoing the decentralisation ?"

"I had provided in my mind for the deficiency by giving the Secretary of State a private secretary, not

a mere clerk promoted on £300 a-year, but a military officer of standing, just as the first Lord of the Admiralty has the aid of an experienced naval officer. The appointment should be well paid, to secure a really good man, and it might very properly carry the rank of general."

"This will draw down the cry of jobbery for a certainty," observed the Duke.

"If distrust of public men is to be the basis of parliamentary criticism, then we can never reform the army or anything else; but Parliament, I should hope, will prove reasonable when they see that one means to be honest."

"But this resuscitation of the Horse-Guards," objected the Premier, "I am afraid it will be unpalatable. I don't know much about these things myself, but I have a sort of impression that the institution was not very popular with Parliament. Hey, Merri-field? Is it not moreover rather a complex and cumbersome affair?"

"The Horse-Guards itself," I observed, "wants simplifying, no doubt. The post of military secretary, for example, as now constituted is an anachronism. The officer commanding the forces must of course have a secretary, and you may call him a military secretary if you like, but he should be merely what the private secretary is to a minister, employed on semi-official correspondence and matters of patronage. The mili-

tary secretary's office has come to be a much greater affair than this, usurping functions properly fulfilled by the adjutant-general. In my view there should be one principal staff-officer for all staff business, and he should properly be called Chief of the Staff. Further the Quartermaster-General's Department should certainly be abolished. Have staff-officers for surveying, and for getting intelligence, and so forth, and plenty of them ; there should always be plenty of brains at work, gaining information and working out projects for attack and defence,—there is no real economy in cutting down your staff too much ; but the business of moving troops—which is all the Quartermaster-General's Department has to do in peace time—is not sufficient to warrant our keeping up a separate establishment of equal status with the Adjutant-General's Department."

"By the way," said Mr Merrifield, "would it not be a good thing to get rid of some of these cumbersome titles ? So far as I understand the matter, the man you call an assistant-adjutant-general is not assisting the adjutant-general, nor is the deputy-assistant-quartermaster-general deputed to do anything in particular. Could not you alter these long-winded names ? They seem to stand forth now as emblems of a good deal that is antiquated in our military system."


"Very true, and now is the time to sweep away these cobwebs. I propose a much simpler arrange-

ment for the future, a homogeneous staff with short, simple names. But now to pass on from details to principles. There are certain things to be done at once, as to which I believe we are all agreed; the coast defences to be completed; a great reserve magazine to be established in the midland counties—we *must* insure ourselves against the ruin that would follow the loss of Woolwich. Then there are the defensive works round London; these may be regarded as a *sine quâ non* in the present state of public feeling, so I hope you will approve of my having set them in hand already; Mr Merrifield concurs, and a million will do about what is needed."

"Oh, of course," replied the Premier, "the country would not keep us in office a week if we did not do that much. But all these are surely matters of detail too. What about the army itself? for that is what I am told we stand most in need of."

"Well, as to that, my scheme is as follows, subject of course to the criticism of the Commander-in-Chief, who will want a day or two to get into his seat. I do not propose to increase the embodied army beyond a small addition to the cavalry, notwithstanding the critical state of things. Our insular position will always give us a little time; what we have to do, I conceive, is to organise reserves on a much larger scale than anything we have had hitherto, and in a form immediately available. And, as I said before, it seems to me that for this purpose, under the cir-

cumstances of a rich country like England, with a passion for liberty carried almost to excess, the true policy is to avoid all danger of checking the national unanimity by proposing enforced service, and to pay for what we want in hard coin. We must go into the labour market, in fact, like other employers of labour. Now then, how to get these reserves? You can't obtain a reserve of the strength needed merely by passing men through the ranks, and letting a part of their time be spent on furlough. To get a large reserve in this way you would want a large embodied army; moreover, the plan does not fit in with our colonial service. Further, there is this objection to a large reserve of this sort, that these men if thrown in large numbers on the labour market after having been withdrawn from civil pursuits, will find a difficulty in earning their livelihood. I think, therefore, that we ought to look to a reserve of soldiers who shall not be withdrawn from civil life at all, except for training. I have drawn up a scheme, therefore, for attracting to each regiment a strong reserve of men who will be required merely to undergo the needful preliminary training, and to come out for occasional drill during peace time, and who are to receive a small rate of daily pay, as retaining fee for their services when required. It seems to me that in this way you will get what you want, with a minimum of disturbance to the industry of the country, and a minimum of expense.



"Besides this reserve, the militia is to be made available for service abroad in peace time, but then the militia is to be made a very different sort of thing from what it has been hitherto; it will be amalgamated thoroughly with the line, and officered entirely from the latter. The militia soldiers are also to have a permanent retaining fee, but smaller than that paid to the reserve, because their liability to be sent abroad will be smaller. I should hope that from a shilling to eighteenpence a-day will be found sufficient for the line reserves; and from sixpence to ninepence for the militiamen. If not, we must bid higher. But at this rate, every 100,000 of reserves will cost almost about two and a quarter millions a-year."

"And a cheaper way of getting them, I believe it would be difficult to find," said the Duke, who seemed much pleased with the plan.

"Still," objected Mr Merrifield, "the whole scheme is complicated and illogical, compared with the sweet simplicity of enforced service on every able-bodied male."

"But I suppose," said the Duke, "what we want is some plan which will work practically, and can be set in hand at once."

"Very true," answered Mr Merrifield; "still, West's plan is logically quite indefensible. However, I will say no more on that point; the first thing, no doubt, is to do something."

"Talking of logic, John," observed his brother-in-law, "I should like you to look presently at something I have here;" and he pointed to a bundle of papers on the further side of the table which appeared to be proof-sheets, a fragment, apparently, of the great work on *The Unthinkable*, on which it was understood that the Duke was engaged. "Well," he continued, looking rather bored, "is there anything more to be discussed?"

"There is, of course, an immense deal to be said as well as done," I answered; "but the subject is involved in a multitude of details which I don't know that I need trouble you with, although they make up a great whole. The number of line regiments has to be reduced. Then there is the distribution of this new force to be considered. Soldiers alone don't make an army, nor individual regiments nor even brigades or divisions. This is a matter to be arranged forthwith. The German system, with its complete localisation by army corps, is not applicable to our circumstances of colonial and Indian reliefs, and the army corps is too large a unit for our small establishment in peace time. Further, the bulk of the embodied troops must be stationed mainly in the fortified towns in the south, while the headquarters of regiments must be among the centres of population in the north. Still I propose a uniform plan; the abolition of all the small independent military districts now maintained, and a

redistribution of the home forces among divisions of uniform size, subdivided into brigades. More general officers will be actively employed than at present, but *per contra* there will be a saving practicable in the colonial commands, the staff of which is now altogether overdone; and eventually there should be a large saving in the establishment of generals, which is to be largely reduced, and converted into a working grade, being like all others limited in strength to the numbers actually employed. Then all honorary rank is to be abolished, and honorary promotions on retirement. Relative rank is to be overhauled, and readjusted with reference to the increased responsibilities and higher education of the combatant officer in these times. Then there are various plans for raising the status of the soldier, and making the army more respectable. We hope a great deal may be done by localising the reserve still more completely than is the case at present; by the thorough fusion contemplated between the line and militia; by making the recruiting personal, and the colonel the recruiting officer of his own regiment. I think, too, I see the way to render the army more of a career for the soldier; and I hope that instead of desertions occurring, dismissal may soon be regarded as a misfortune and disgrace."

"Well," observed the Premier, "perhaps it will be better to defer going into these points until you have

finally settled them with the Commander-in-Chief;" —and as the Duke now certainly seemed a little bored, and was casting a sidelong glance at his proof-sheets, the meeting soon broke up.

"The Duke is certainly the right man in the right place," observed Mr Braham, as the three of us walked away together from Ulster House. "The only man in England who is not in a flurry just now."

"And so quick at seizing the point of a case," said Mr Merrifield; "it is quite delightful to do business with him. If he would only be persuaded to give up for a time hankering after finishing that big book of his. There is surely enough to think about just now, without going into the Unthinkable."

"That is what keeps his head so cool," replied Mr Braham. "I wish Von Uberlisten could have seen him to-day. See, too," added Mr Braham, sententiously, "how admirably he exemplifies the genius of decentralisation. No undue interference with the business of departments. No tendency there to go too closely into details."

"There is one point I am surprised he did not take up," observed Mr Merrifield. "It passes my comprehension how Ulster of all men should not perceive the superior advantages, upon every ground of reason and justice, of resting the defence of the country on the liability of all citizens to military service."

At this point the speaker left us to take his own road home, and the separation of our party was not

made too soon, for quite a crowd of people were now following us, attracted by the novel and interesting sight of these two distinguished men walking in company with each other.

"How long will it be," said Mr Braham, as we continued our course together—"how long will it be before we can look the enemy boldly in the face? The whole course of future events abroad seems to turn on this."

"There must be still a few weeks of apparent confusion and helplessness, while the process of conversion takes place, but we can hardly move faster than we are going, although there is not much to show so far. The first thing to be done is to get the men, of course; we shall ask the House to vote these tomorrow, you know, and the proclamation inviting enlistment into the reserves is ready drafted, and may be got out the next day. I daresay we shall have something like the appearance of an army within a couple of months. But we are in awful apparent confusion and hurry-scurry at this moment, and shall be in worse a fortnight hence. However, once done, the thing need never be done again. The British army will be 'fixed up' for good."

"Even this preliminary bustle has had its effect on foreign politics," observed my companion. "Already I think I can begin to discern some slight indications of more peaceable tendency in the north."

"It is most devoutly to be hoped the signs may be true."

"Yet I begin to think," rejoined Mr Braham, "the nation will be almost sorry to be balked of a little fighting, now that its blood is up ; and you, I suspect, will find it difficult to avoid a desire to try the temper of your new weapon when you have forged it."

"It is my business to breathe blood and thunder just now, and to try to instil enthusiasm into everybody else ; but I feel a sort of impostor all the time, for I have not a spark of that professional zeal which imparts a pleasure to war for its own sake. I look on it as about the worst use you can put men to, knowing what a blundering, brutal, wasteful business war actually is at best, even what people are pleased to call scientific war. Merrifield himself cannot be more pacific in heart than I am."

"But Merrifield is becoming quite bloodthirsty ; look how excited he is about the forced enlistment. I hope he won't be doing anything mischievous in that line. If he were to throw us over on that point, and take to stumping the country on the conscription ticket, there would very soon be an end of the Great United Administration."

I fancy that Mr Braham spoke in jest ; nevertheless I was pained at this light way of talking about my revered friend and patron, but as we parted just at this moment, on reaching the corner of Plantagenet Square, where the Foreign Secretary lived, while I turned off into Tudor Gardens, I had not an opportunity of saying anything in reply.

CHAPTER LXII.

REPORTS PROGRESS.

BUT the quiet tenor of these easy conversations reflected very incorrectly the true aspect of our life at this time. Changing flank in face of the enemy is proverbially a delicate operation, and to be done quickly; and to recast your military system, with the prospect of desperate European war breaking out at any moment, was a thing to be carried out with the utmost despatch. While, therefore, it might be all very well to discuss measures calmly with the Duke of Ulster—and no man possessed in a higher degree that valuable self-possession which Napoleon called two-o'clock-in-the-morning courage, suitable for piloting the state through the breakers which menaced our course in every direction—the days passed actually in a sort of official whirlwind. Everything had to be done in a hurry, and done at once, yet if possible done well; and witnessing the scene of apparent confusion presented by the War Department at this time, I could not control the

anxious self-questioning that perforce arose, whether I had not attempted a task beyond my powers, and whether out of all this turmoil and upsetting and rearrangement, order would ever be evolved. Nor was there any lack of critics to express the same doubt, not always too impartial; for in a reform of this sort there must needs be sufferers, and men do not readily see the merits of a change which renders them superfluous. This is the man, it was said by these persons, who wanted to simplify and reduce. Why, instead of the promised simplicity and reduction of business, there never was such a bustle and so much work before! Which was quite true; and I felt that if anything happened to stop our course before it was accomplished—a quarrel among the would-be Continental thieves, or a sudden decline in the national fervour, or any other cause tending to turn out the party of progress—my successor would succeed to a condition of things far worse than that which I had attempted to improve, and I should be denounced as a rash impostor, a sort of political Prometheus, a mortal who had vainly tried to handle celestial weapons; and I thought of the homilies that would be poured forth, about the folly of promoting young politicians to high places, of making a man War Minister who had never been even at the Board of Trade or Education Department, and how clearly it would be proved that in these days of complex government long experience was the first qualifica-

tion for office. However, the business having been begun must be gone on with, but I confess that at times no one was more disposed to doubt my competency for the task before me than myself. Is a great general, I wonder, not surprised sometimes to find he has won a battle, and may he not be disposed to think well of himself for the first time when the plaudits of his countrymen convey the belief of others in his merits?

In truth, it was indeed a scene of turmoil, for a time. There being so much business to be disposed of all at once, the only practicable plan seemed to be to appoint committees of the best men who could be found, either in or out of the office, to draw up detailed regulations, upon general instructions, for giving effect to each part of the new organisation, and drafting the various warrants to be issued thereon. Thus in a day or two we had committees sitting upon almost every conceivable point, and innumerable references coming up from them every minute for disposal. The office worked with a will, not excepting Burley; but the knowledge that his appointment was now superfluous, and would cease on the completion of the different matters in hand, was hardly calculated to diminish my friend's natural tendency to overload his business with minutes and statistical returns. And thus every scheme being made the subject of a proposal for a fresh tabular statement, there threatened to be a somewhat be-

wildering accumulation of superfluous matter upon the work in hand ; but the difficulty was happily disposed of when, on the Governorship of the South Pacific Islands falling vacant, the Secretary for the Colonies, at Mr Merrifield's instance, offered it to Burley. The appointment fortunately presented peculiar attractions for that able official, inasmuch as this important settlement had hitherto been conspicuous for the dearth of accurate statistical information available regarding it. It was not even known, so Burley told me, what proportion the children of mixed parentage bore to the total population, or what percentage of the converted inhabitants belonged to each religious denomination. To rescue the islands from this deplorable condition was therefore a congenial task ; and my friend started for his new appointment full of ardour, with an extra cabin full of blue-books, and several dozen specimen samples of blank forms to be filled in on arrival. Meddell and McMuddell, I suspect, each shed a silent tear over the memory of so much departed worth ; while poor Mr Bajherd, the Indexer-General, became more anxious than ever as his eye wandered sadly over the shelves in the store-room, groaning under the weight of piles of blank returns never again to be called into use. But generally the office entered with much zest upon the great work in hand ; O'Verduit, of my old branch, was quite invaluable ; and Trubbell Soame, up to this time Burley's private

Secretary, who was a very clever fellow, had thrown himself into the current of the stream with admirable loyalty.

A timely attack of gout had already solved the difficulty about disposing of Sir Frederick Baton. The presence of the chief of the staff being particularly needed just now, he had naturally taken the opportunity to go off to Buxton—Baden-Baden not being accessible with decency to the head of the army in present European crisis—and so might be shelved without doing violence to his feelings. There was no difficulty about filling up the new and higher appointment to be created, in the person of an officer of rank whose services and ability had secured the confidence of the army and the country, a practical soldier, and a man of business and good sense into the bargain. This resuscitation of the chief command was naturally popular with the army; and the new Commander-in-Chief, with a new chief of the staff as his principal *aide*, a headquarter staff organised on the new system, and a strong branch for the intelligence department, was very quickly at work, taking his full share of the great business in hand.

This was indeed a season of high-pressure, for every hour was of moment, and the business of months had to be crowded into days. Had war been actually proclaimed, the excitement and activity

could scarcely have been greater ; for the nation felt as if it were living on the edge of a mine, and no man could predict the moment when the explosion would take place. The great powers abroad, meanwhile, eagerly watched our proceedings, for which, indeed, every facility was afforded, the newspapers being filled with the reports of their special military correspondents from various parts of the country ; so that not only did the British public get every morning the fullest information how the money was being spent which its representatives had voted, but these interesting details were also telegraphed to all parts of the world. The progress in recruiting the reserves, the extra hands engaged at Woolwich, the strength of the working parties employed on the defences of London, the state of the new great arsenal in the north, the augmentation of the field artillery, the practice made with the new guns and all the ingenious new inventions adopted for the better destruction of life, the doings at the various camps of exercise, even the number of hours spent by the Secretary of State in his office,—all these facts were as well known to all parties interested as to that individual himself and the rest of the Cabinet. But publicity has its advantages ; the would-be disturbers of the peace of Europe saw that England was in earnest, and the more far-sighted political meteorologists thought that they could already detect some faint gleam of light in the black thunder-cloud on the horizon. They

would have been still more assured had Mr Braham's confidential opinion been made public; for that astute statesman was not without hope that the great conflict might yet be averted.

If anything could procure this happy consummation, it would certainly be the bold front displayed by England, and the forwardness of her preparation. "We must not delay for a moment," said the noble Premier, calm and cool, perchance not without a mental sigh, as thinking of the proof-sheets of his great work lying uncorrected. "Are you sure you have taken money enough?" asked Mr Merrifield. "Real economy lies in expenditure just now. The nation will stand a shilling income-tax without flinching, and export duty on coal is bringing in a splendid revenue. Twenty millions or so were well spent, if it save us from spending twenty times twenty millions in wicked war, and sums untold in waste of precious human lives."

The time flies apace in the rush of work, and yet seems long, looking back on all that was done. The days indeed go mostly in talk, or perhaps in listening. As many officials have to be conferred with as there are half-hours in the day, and later on plans have to be unfolded and explained, and perhaps defended in the House. But the House is always reasonable, especially when taken into confidence, and the proposals of Government commend themselves to all

right-thinking men. Mr Merrifield, too, is always ready to undertake the work of argumentative elucidation when asked—often indeed without being asked—and bears down all opposition by perspicuous statement and force of argument and illustration ; his whole-hearted support qualified only by a reservation of doubt, implied rather than expressed, regarding the impolicy of not enforcing the obligation of universal military service—on which topic the leader of the House is so persuasive, copious, and sarcastic, that the defenders of the voluntary system are left logically without a leg to stand on. Mr Braham is usually silent, but always ready to rise when necessary, and often by judicious banter and *persiflage* smooths down the feathers which have got ruffled in debate.

But army debates do not come on every evening. The nights are mostly free for work ; and although talking and listening all day leave a sense of excitement and fatigue, a man in health, refreshed by dinner and a nap, may go to work again. Night, too, the best time for writing minutes and reading papers, whereof sundry boxes full, brought home after office hours by messengers in a cab, occupy vacant chairs and tables of the Minister's private room. New forms of estimates and accounts ; draft codes of regulations for departments newly established on autonomic bases—simple and specific procedure the object in view, so that the military runner may read,

and hunting for precedents cease henceforth ; draft warrants for promotion ; draft warrants for this, that, and the other ; plans for new camps ; plans for London defences ; a general upheaval of things military waiting for settlement ; hurry-scurry and high-pressure,—all to culminate in a time of rest, when the English Minister, like the historic German, shall sit calmly at a clear table in an empty office, while the business of the army is done by the proper people. Hard work for the time ; but hard work, at any rate prosperous work, need not hurt a man. Passion, envy, disappointment, these break people down ; but the man who feels that he is achieving success, and while gaining public confidence keeps on good terms with those about him—if the lungs be sound and digestion good, may work well into the night, and rise fresh and early of a morning.

CHAPTER LXIII.

DOMESTIC—LIGHT AND SHADOW.

BUT these are dull days for Eva,—Eva now without her friend, and London dissipation at lowest ebb, affording but limited resource for the long hours ; who sees her husband merely for a few minutes at dinner-time, then perhaps preoccupied, and dropping asleep in his arm-chair during the brief leisure given to the drawing-room before returning to his cabinet. Nor was Eva's husband without uneasy pangs at so much enforced neglect of her : but it was easy to plead with conscience the calls of duty, and the sense of wrong-doing was lulled by a sort of irritation that his wife should be the only person not to appreciate his labours. Had there been sympathy on the one side, it might have been repaid with caressing apologies on the other, and the brief minutes turned to lovers' meetings, the sweeter for their shortness. But, whether from habit or pique, Eva seemed now to contract even the narrow limit of her old interest in his occupations, and her husband retorting, covered

them more than ever with reserve. Thus the short intervals spent together were turned to less than no account, the one absent and preoccupied, the other silent and incurious. Meanwhile, left to herself at all other times, Eva sought such small distractions in so-called gaiety as the town still afforded at that season, dimly conscious, perhaps, by what she heard from others, that her husband was engaged upon a great task which bore in some way on politics; both perhaps in their hearts desiring some opportunity for explanation to check this growing estrangement, each probably discovering an excuse in circumstances for avoiding the first advance towards reconciliation.

It was on one of these days, when official excitement was at its highest, that walking across from Pall Mall to Westminster, I ran against Eva's old friend, Mr Fergusson, the Leatherby doctor. The sight of his handsome face brought me down at once out of the upper regions of political tension, and a rapid vision of peaceful idle days passed over my mind as we shook hands, succeeded by a dull qualm of stricken conscience; his presence reminded me that, prosperous though I had been, my scheme of life had in one sense failed. How different was my wife now from the Eva of the days when I first made Fergusson's acquaintance! And yet the time had been so short.

The doctor had come to town to enter his pupil,

young Harry Perkins, at one of the London hospitals, and to see him established in his new life. So much was due to the lad's worthy mother, naturally anxious at her son's first start in the great world. The matter being settled, he would return to Leatherby to-morrow.

"But, my dear doctor, is it possible that you could be meditating a flight homewards without coming to see my wife and me? Such conduct I should not have believed possible of any Leatherby friend, Liberal or Conservative, much less of you. Besides, there are no Conservatives now, nor any Liberals; we all belong now to the Great United Party."

I rattled on in this way because my friend appeared to be a little confused at this unexpected meeting, thus giving him time to recover himself, and to explain that he knew I was very busy, and so did not like to trouble us with a call.

"Well, of course, these are busy times; but, after all, a man can't do more than have his whole time occupied—as a friend of my acquaintance generally has. I suspect I get as many hours in bed on the average as you, doctor. But now that you have found me out, you will come and put up with us?"

"Thank you very much, but I go back by the early express to-morrow."

"So soon? well then, you will come and dine to-night, at any rate, and bring Mr Harry? I am only going down to the House to answer some questions,

and shall be back early, and we shall be quite alone. Eva will so enjoy talking over Leatherby days."

Punctually at half-past seven our friends arrived ; nor were we kept waiting for dinner, for our new housekeeper had established a reign of punctuality ; but I felt a little uneasy lest the delay of nearly half an hour, which occurred before Eva was ready to descend to the drawing-room, should be set down as a manifestation of fine-ladyism. Not that the time hung heavily, for Mr Fergusson had plenty of local news to retail, and the interesting experiences of his pupil had to be detailed.

"Are you going to be a west-end man, Mr Harry?" I asked, as Mr Fergusson went round the room looking at the pictures. "I am told that St Andrew's hospital is a very good school."

"Well, no, sir ; I should have liked it very much myself ; there's more society, and that sort of thing, of course, in this part of the town, and Andrews's is looked on as quite a fashionable hospital in the profession, and then some of the lecturers there are first-rate. There's Jones, the lecturer on Catarrhal Hysteria, a very famous man in the profession ; and the clinical lectures, too, are very fine. But I have joined Matthews's, Mr Fergusson's old hospital ; you see, sir, you get the advantage of working under Skalple there. I want to be an operating surgeon, and Skalple is quite the first man in Europe. He's not quite so bold in his practice as Slawter, of St Simon's,

perhaps—never ties up the great aorta, or removes limbs at the hip-joint, or things of that sort, like Slawter—Slawter has tied up the aorta three times, and very nearly saved the patient once, they say ; but it's Skalple's delicacy of touch which is so wonderful. The way in which he will carry the knife between a nerve and an artery without touching either of them is quite astonishing. Me and the governor were down at Matthews's this morning to see Skalple operate ; a young man with a tumour in his neck as big as both my fists. All our students were there, of course, and all the leading surgeons in London, to see the operation ; yet there he was, as cool as anything, working away, as one gentleman said near me, just as if he might have been in the dissecting-room playing with a subject, talking away all the time to our house-surgeon, who was helping him, and he within an ace of the carotid all the time. It was really a beautiful sight."

"It must have been, indeed, especially for the young man. But here comes Mrs West."

Any suspicion of fine-ladyism must have been at once set at rest by Eva's cordial greetings and pretty low-spoken excuses for being so late ; and as she came up to them I could see that both our guests were startled by the aspect of their hostess, although both knowing her so well ; and truly, as she entered at the other end of the long room, the bright light and gay surroundings, even her own handsome dress,

made from their very contrast a brilliant setting to the picture she presented—the slight graceful figure, erect save for the pretty droop of the girlish head, with the low modest brow crowned by the pretty rippling hair. While, as she came forward, with the associations of Eva's former life as a country girl thus brought to mind by the presence of her old friends, I too was struck by the incongruity between herself, her simple bringing up and former way of life, and the circumstances in which she was now placed. As for Harry Perkins, the young man's self-possession quite deserted him, and his high colour became still brighter as he exchanged greetings.

The conversation as we sat down to dinner naturally turned at first on Mr Perkins's London movements, in which Eva, with unusual animation, expressed much interest, although evidently puzzled to understand what mode of motion was implied by walking the hospitals.

"And where do you mean to settle down, Mr Harry," she asked, "when you have finished your education? I suppose at Stampton? How nice it will be for Mrs Perkins to be keeping house for you in her own home!"

"Well, I don't quite know about that, Mrs West. I don't think I could make up my mind to settle down to a country practice."

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tion for the army will be, if it is not already, quite as complete and severe as that for the medical practitioner ; and that to be able to run off the names of bone articulations is not science, and that to get up the dogmatic formulæ that do duty for medical science is not education. At least, so says De Spet-tick, the head of our Medical Department. Anyhow, the paramount object in view is to make the captain a big man. Besides, after all, the doctors get a good start, for they leave school mostly at an age when other boys are beginning to go there."

This was the only professional topic discussed during the evening. The conversation turned mainly upon Leatherby and our friends there, in talking of whom Eva became quite animated, throwing off the expression of listlessness which she generally exhibited during our *tête-à-tête* dinners. The evening passed away only too quickly, and Fergusson went away early, being under engagement to pay a late visit to an old friend now practising in London. At least he made this his excuse for leaving. "We have taken up enough of your time, as it is," he said, as he rose to go ; "for I suppose you have a long night's work before you. We Leatherby folks are very proud of our member, I can assure you. But it must be terrible hard work."

"You speak like a man out for a holiday, and sure of your night's rest for once. But I suspect it is far easier to sit writing comfortably in one's chair than to

spend the nights as you so often have to do, aiding the matrons of Leatherby in their laudable efforts to supply future War Ministers with raw material for their armies. At any rate, it seems to agree with you."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Harry Perkins, as he and Fergusson were putting on their greatcoats in the hall, "but if it would not be too great a liberty, I should take it as a great favour if you would give me an order for the House of Commons some day. I should like so much to hear some speeches. Our lecturers at Matthews's are very fine speakers, of course; but I believe there is a great deal to be learnt from the Parliamentary gentlemen."

"It is hardly fair, perhaps, to compare us with so high a standard. Your lecturers possess the advantage of always having something to say, which is the great difficulty with many of our orators. But a better plan than getting an order for the gallery, where you can't see anything, will be to send me in your card any day when you come, and then, if the House is not very full, I could bring you in under the gallery, where you will be close to all the celebrities."

"Before we go," said Mr Fergusson, interrupting his pupil's thanks, "I should like to say one word to you alone."

"By all means; let us step in here. Mr Harry, will you excuse us for a moment?" And leaving

the young gentleman standing in the hall with the footman, I led the way into the dining-room, where the embers were still alight on the fire.

"I am sure," said Fergusson, when the door was shut, "you will not consider it a liberty, coming from so old a friend, and one who has attended her from childhood, if I offer you a caution about Mrs West's health. She appears to me to be extremely delicate."

"Eva! I thought she looked unusually well to-night. Generally she looks pale and delicate, but the pleasure of seeing her old friends made her quite rosy this evening."

"Yes, she had a colour, but it was not the flush of health; it came and went. You see her every day; I have not seen her for more than a year—since she had that accident—and I assure you the change quite shocked me, she looked so weak and frail. Does she ever complain of the effects of that fall?"

"No, not to my knowledge. She was a good deal upset by an unfortunate incident which occurred in our household some weeks ago, but she seemed to be getting over it. And as for being weak, why, my dear doctor, you ought to see her at a ball. She will dance till any hour of the morning without stopping, and she goes out to parties of one sort or another night after night."

"The very worst thing for her."

There was not light enough to see my friend's face,

shaded by the mantelpiece, as we stood together before the fire, but his voice expressed gravity and concern.

"But what is to be done?" I asked. "You see every moment of my time is occupied just now; I hardly see her for days together except when snatching a hasty meal. I am obliged to give up all society at present till this army job is settled; and I don't mind saying to you, because you must know it already, Eva does not find much interest in the sort of pursuits some women take interest in. It would be dreadfully dull work for the poor child if she were to be always moping at home because I cannot go about with her."

"London altogether is, I should think, a very bad place for her, especially during the winter," replied Fergusson. "The south of England would be much more suitable, or still better the south of France."

"Then do you think her lungs are affected?"

"That I cannot say without an examination, and I should hope not. There is no cough apparent. But where there is so much natural delicacy of constitution there is need of every precaution."

"But how is it to be managed? She could not go alone, and you must see that my going with her is impracticable."

"Of course; but I thought, perhaps, if you knew of any lady friend——"

"I wish I did; but a friend of that sort is not

easily found. It would be useless to press her aunt to go?"

"I should be afraid so. When people get to that age they often come to take peculiar notions of duty."

"And Miss Barton's notion of duty is never to leave Leatherby. I am fairly puzzled. We have heaps of so-called friends about, of course, like everybody else, but none of the sort that could be ordered off to Pau or Nice at a moment's notice. The only person I can think of is Mary Drew—she would do anything for Eva; but then a couple of young girls can't be travelling about the Continent together. Besides, to send Eva off in that way would certainly frighten her, and might make matters worse. What is to be done? Is this move actually necessary, do you think, doctor?" I added, after a pause, as he did not reply.

"No," answered Fergusson at last, "certainly I do not say that, and possibly I may have said even more than was justified; but I should not have been satisfied to go away without offering this caution. However, I must not detain you any longer; good night."

After the hall-door closed on the good doctor, I returned to the empty room to ponder over his advice, trying to form a resolve. What if I were to throw up office and carry my wife off in search of health? And as the idea came into my thoughts, there rested

there for an instant a vision of a new life—a life devoted to the pursuit of quiet happiness, satisfying a longing which ever made itself felt, even in the whirl of politics and business. For conscience always whispered that one duty was still unfulfilled. That docile mind, so gentle and guileless, might yet give a return for proper cultivation. She is still so young, almost so childlike ; surely there is yet time by care to create some mutual sympathy of tastes and thoughts—at any rate, to check the growth of that virtual estrangement so rapidly dividing us. And then this warning to shelter her from the cold northern air. Surely my wife had the first claim ; and what are name and fame if happiness be lost ?

But then the same inner voice whispered that it would be disgraceful to give up my present work merely in pursuit of happiness. To quit office now, before order has emerged from chaos, to be succeeded by some new man who would make confusion worse confounded, and to be denounced as a rash young blunderer, an impostor trading on the public credulity, who flies the task, all too great for such a one, which his vanity had tempted him to undertake despite the warning forebodings of wiser men ! What chance of happiness for one of whom the world was saying this ; a man with discontent gnawing at his heart, as he thinks in the bitterness of solitude of the one great opportunity of his life heedlessly, recklessly thrown away. Reckless indeed ; for is not one's

first duty to his country? Needless too, surely; for, after all, our good mentor merely recommended change. He did not say it was absolutely necessary, and he had not the opportunity for certain judgment. And then I tried to recollect whether Eva was really looking different from what she was before—to recall her face and figure as they were, three months, six months ago. Vain effort! we can no more trace the daily change in those we live with, than we can reproduce the fleeting forms of yesterday's sunset clouds.

Musing thus, I returned up-stairs to look at Eva herself, and see if I could observe the signs which Fergusson had spoken of. But she had gone to her room. I turned to her picture hanging against the wall,—the one which had attracted so much attention in last year's Exhibition. As well it might, for seldom does artist secure a fairer subject, and very happily had this one dealt with it: the slight graceful figure robed in evening dress, a light scarf round her shoulders; the hands crossed, a fan and bouquet pendent from the taper fingers; the droop of the gentle head, the low brow crowned with rippling brown hair; the wistful innocent face; the soft blue eyes joining in question with the half-parted lips,—the picture looked down from its frame like Eva's self; and gazing up at it, I sought for token whether that too told any tale of change. Yes; there could be no doubt about it. The original was even more

fragile-looking than the picture. But then we all said at the time that the painter had flattered a little. Something of truth had been sacrificed to effect, and the pretty delicate shoulders drawn a shade too full. Thinking over the matter in undecided fashion, I passed on to the inner room, the library appropriated to work, the tables of which were covered as usual with papers of urgency, which I looked at for a time irresolutely. Prominent among these was the report on the defences of London, which had to be brought up to the Cabinet Council next day at noon. No time, therefore, was to be lost in reveries ; this case and others must be mastered before morning : and shaking off my dreamy mood, I settled down to the night's work.

CHAPTER LXIV.

A TRAGEDY IN HUMBLE LIFE.

IN the conversation with Mr Fergusson recorded in the last chapter, reference was made to an unfortunate domestic incident which had happened a short time before, and a little episode must here find a place, unimportant in itself to all but a few, and not bearing directly on our fortunes, but yet not without its influence on what followed.

When, on arrival in England, nearly three years before the time now under record, Eva and I paid our first visit to Leatherby, she engaged there as body-servant a little maid, niece to Hannah and Maria, the two servants who composed her aunt Emily's establishment,—a gentle, modest little damsel, neat in person and dexterous with hand, altogether a promising subject for conversion into an accomplished lady's-maid. Annette had never left her native Leatherby till she accompanied us to London, and I well remember the nervous anxiety she felt at the pronounced manners of the servants' hall

at the Grand Belgravia Hotel ; also, that when we took her with us to Kissengen in the autumn of that year, the maid, whose admiring bewilderment at the scenes of our foreign travel was amusing to observe, required at first almost as much looking after as her mistress, but very soon became handy and helpful, and the best traveller among us. After this tour, Annette did not come much under my observation ; at most I passed her now and then on the stairs, or perhaps came upon her while brushing Eva's hair in her room : but I noticed that she appeared to have caught something of her mistress's grace of manner, and in her quiet way the same taste in dress ; and I noticed, too, that while her face was demure enough, and eyes downcast, the once timid expression had been replaced by an air of greater self-possession. Eva took very kindly to the girl, who in turn seemed to be really fond of her mistress—and who could help loving Eva who came under the influence of her gentle ways ?—and amid all the changes of our shifting household, Annette remained constant to us, the one fixed element in the domestic kaleidoscope ; we came, in short, to regard her as almost one of the family, and Eva was often wont, when going shopping or driving alone, to take her humble friend as escort.

It was, therefore, with some pain and surprise that I had come away from a conversation held with her aunt Hannah, Miss Barton's housemaid, during the

visit we had paid to Leatherby after the autumn manœuvres on Arrowdown. That excellent domestic intercepting me one afternoon as I was about to enter the house after smoking a cigar in the garden, and prefacing speech by a curtesy, asked if she might make bold to speak to me a minute. It was about their niece. She and Maria knew the Captain and Miss Eva—that is, Mrs West—had been very kind to our girl—"we calls her our girl, but of course you know, sir, she's only our niece, but her mother and father both dying, and we having to keep and look after her, it comes natural like to call her so, and no mother that ever was could be fonder than my sister and I are of our Annette. We feel it very kind of you and your good lady to take so kindly to our girl—but, laws! Miss Eva, she couldn't help of course being kind spoken to every one; and I do assure you, sir, it's not because we are not bounden for your kindness that I make so bold as to speak, but it's because our Annette—leastways that's not her real name, you know, sir, but the Miss Bamfylde, their upper housemaid being called Anne, of course they used to call her Annette, so as to make a difference between them, and that's how she came by that name——"

Well, I asked, trying to stop this flow of explanation, what had gone amiss with Annette? for that was what she seemed to be driving at.

"It's this, sir: me and my sister we both seem to

think the girl's got to be changed ; she ain't like the same girl she was afore she went to London."

" Well, but so she has changed, no doubt, and no wonder ; Mrs West has turned her into quite a smart lady's-maid——" I confess I had my doubts about Eva's share in the transformation—" you surely wouldn't wish her to remain always a raw country lass ? "

" No, sir, it isn't that ; we know that you and Miss Eva—that's Mrs West, have been real kind to our girl, and very grateful we are, I do assure you, sir. Well, I don't know exactly how to put it, sir, but—but there's a many things seems to go on in gentlefolks' kitchens in London that didn't ought to."

Thinking of the various dynasties which had succeeded to the rule in our lower regions, I could not but assent silently to the probable truth of this proposition as regarded our establishment at any rate. Speaking aloud, I asked what was the particular point she wished to enforce.

" Well, sir, me and Maria, it seems to us, Annette has grown so bold-like."

" Bold ? why, a gentler-looking girl I never saw ; she moves about the house like a little ghost."

" Yes, sir, that's where it is, and that's what makes it all the odder. The girl seems so quiet to look at, and yet she speaks out that way as really quite makes one stare. You'll excuse me, sir, but I think you must have had some people in your house such as didn't

ought to be in any decent house, leave alone gentle-folks'."

I felt inwardly abashed at this too true criticism, and could only reply that Annette was, I believed, usually in the work-room up-stairs when not attending on her mistress.

There was more conversation of the same sort. Had she spoken to Eva on the subject? Well, Miss Eva, if I would excuse her saying so, hardly understood what she was driving at; and so she had taken the liberty of coming to me. Then, again, the girl never went to church; "Now you know, sir, we have always been brought up regular church-goers, and Miss Barton always allows both Maria and me to go to church twice a-day every Sunday regular."

Surely Annette went to church? I said. No, and she as good as boasted of it to her aunts that folks never went to church in London.

I promised attention to what the good woman told me, which left me with an uneasy sense of duty unfulfilled; and on our return to town I spoke to Eva about it.

"Your aunt's servants seem to think, Eva, that their niece is not altogether improved by her London life."

"I don't know why they should think so, I am sure; I think she has improved very much. She was such an old-fashioned little thing when she came to us, and now she is fit for anything. And

you always say that she dresses my hair beautifully, just as if she had been brought up to it."

"I don't mean that exactly, but I am afraid she has not learned much good from some of our former servants."

"I daresay not; that cook used to talk—I don't mean the last one, or Jenkins, but the one before Jenkins—she used to talk dreadfully, I know; Berkshire accent I believe they called it—h's put in and h's left out; it was dreadful; but I don't think Annette caught it of her. Indeed I think she has improved; you know she used to talk fearful Yewcestershire when she came to us, 'tue' for 'two,' and 'vokes' for 'folks;' but she is quite cured of that now."

This unintentional diversion from the subject did not encourage me to pursue it, but I made one more effort.

"There is one point you might see to, I think, and that is that she should go to church regularly."

"So she does, every Sunday."

"Hannah, her aunt, told me when we were at Leatherby that she made a boast of never going."

"Well, she is supposed to go; she always has leave for the purpose."

"Ah, but that is not enough. You ought, my dear, to see to these things yourself. Remember the girl has come up from the country under our charge."

"I don't see how I am to manage this unless we take her to church always with ourselves. I don't suppose you want me to be always spying after her, or to go out with her of a Sunday afternoon."

"Eva, that is not spoken like yourself. But I don't want to dictate to you how you should do your duty ; you must know what I mean quite well."

"Of course I know that I never do anything right, I know that," said Eva, pettishly. "But I certainly didn't expect to be told that I was unkind to Annette. Why, she is always in my room upstairs as if she were a friend more than a servant, and I never let her sit up for me when I am out late at night."

With a few more words of the same sort, which had no effect but to leave a bitter flavour behind them, the conversation ended ; nor did occasion arise for renewing the subject, which got itself forgotten amid other and more absorbing matters, till I was painfully reminded of it by an occurrence which took place some months later. It was the last week of our stay in the little house by Queen's Gate, after Mary Drew's departure, and during the first eventful days of the new Administration, that I walked home one night from the House. It was about eleven o'clock, and Eva had not returned from a party ; for although sultry August, the London season in this eventful year was still dragging its weary length along, the Continent being practically closed, and Parliament

still sitting. Nor was I expected at home, for a debate had been looked for that evening, and I had left word before going away in the morning that I should dine at the House, and not be home till after midnight. But there had been an unexpected early adjournment. Walking then up the door-steps, I was just about to ring for the servant to let me in, in order to apprise him of my return, when my hand was arrested by the sound of coarse loud laughter coming up the area, plainly heard through the open windows of what was termed the house-keeper's room. This grated on my ear as something beyond even the loud manners of a kitchen, and accordingly letting myself in by the latch-key I descended to the basement. The noise continued, high-pitched male and female voices, not wholly unfamiliar it seemed, effectually drowning the sound of my footstep, so that I came upon the party without warning. They were four in number; Gates my man, Annette, a strange man, who looked to be a valet, and a high-coloured young woman, who certainly was not a servant. They were engaged in playing at cards, the men with pipes in their mouths, their coats off, and waistcoats open, for the night was hot, and their feet on opposite corners of the table, which was garnished with decanters and glasses. The strange young woman was lolling back in her chair with her cards held up before her, while Annette was leaning forward with both elbows on

the table, her face resting on the palms of her hands, and in the act apparently of uttering some loud retort.

That an entertainment should be given downstairs during our absence was not a surprising thing in itself; but there was an air of *abandon* about the party which was thoroughly disgusting. The caution of the girl's aunt at once came back to my mind; I felt disgust, too, at having been imposed on by false appearances, and at the idea that any one should come near Eva who was tainted by such association.

The party all got on their feet as soon as they saw me, except the strange young woman; the men were evidently in liquor, and so, I perceived, with a sense almost of horror, were their companions.

There was little to be done or said.

"Annette, go up-stairs to your room. Let these people leave the house at once, Gates, and then put out the lights."

The girl obeyed the order without speaking, but as she passed by me to reach the door, she looked up askance with a look half ashamed, half saucy, and I saw only too plainly that she must have been drinking.

The strange young woman put on her bonnet and shawl leisurely, with an impudent smile on her face.

"The gentleman looks riled, don't he?" she said, in a loud voice; "so I suppose we had better hook

it. 'Tain't no good staying where you ain't welcome—is it, Tommy, my man?"

"Come, you hold your jaw, will you?" said the person addressed, who, although not steady on his legs, had sense enough to understand the nature of the position. "None of your impudence, but just come along."

"Why, how you do take on," replied the girl, as she moved to the area-door, and then turning round with a leer, added; "I ain't a-said anything to hurt the gentleman's feelings, have I? No offence taken I hope, where none ain't meant. Good night, Bill; I hope the governor won't cut up rough about this here little lark in the morning."

This speech made the strange man more angry, and they went up the area-steps wrangling together, and I could hear their high voices and the girl's brazen laughter for some way down the street.

My own servant was easily disposed of, for the man received his wages the next morning in respectful silence, making no attempt at excuse or justification. He had been only a few months in our service, the last of a succession of male dynasties abdicating from stress of subterranean revolutions; a good-looking fellow, and, I had supposed, not a bad servant. I thought with a sigh of relief that in a few days, when we moved into our new house, there would be a strong domestic government at last under the dictatorship of a judicious matron, and freedom from the distraction of those small household worries. Withal

I could not help being struck with the absurdity of the situation, thinking what the public would say did they know that the man who was supposed to embody in this great crisis the national energy, straining every nerve to make head against threatened invasion of his country, was really engaged the while in repelling an invasion of his kitchen. And yet, I thought, this incident may have its counterpart in other households. Few men so lofty-minded as to rise above all domestic considerations. Wrinkles on the statesman's brow may come from other cares than those of office, and time be spent in other ways than writing masterly despatches. Billancoo, our new Paymaster-General, gets so late to office sometimes, I suspect, because he must stop to have the last word with his wife over the breakfast-table; and as for more harmless pursuits, if a man is fond of his stable or his kennel, and thinks he can do things himself better than other people, he may easily spend half the day blistering a horse or doctoring a favourite dog. There is nothing easier than to waste time; but while we are conscious of the hours we lose ourselves, we do not observe our neighbours' wanderings out of the straight heroic path.

The misconduct of our little maid was not so easily disposed of as the man's offence. To send the poor girl home in disgrace because her natural guardians had neglected their duty of looking after her properly was not to be thought of, and having

put off a half-thought-out plan for removing her from her place about my wife till the time had gone by for carrying it out, I suppose it was moral cowardice which made me depute the task of lecturing her to Eva ; the mental excuse being that my wife's gentle admonition might prove more effectual than my sterner reproof. Eva told me afterwards that she cried bitterly when spoken to, but said nothing in the way of excuse or repentance, and I noticed that the girl looked pale and her eyelids swollen, and her aspect half sullen, half ashamed, when I met her on the stairs. But we were now possessed by the first excitement of newly-assumed office, and in the whirl of public business I had almost forgotten the whole affair, when it was suddenly brought back to recollection by Annette's disappearance.

It was the morning on which we were to change houses, that as I was leaving my dressing-room to go down-stairs, Eva called to me from her room to find out why Annette had not answered her bell. But Annette was nowhere to be found. No one could give any tidings of her, and her bed had not been slept in. She must have gone away on the previous night. The wardrobe of her neat little room contained several dresses, mostly presents from her mistress ; her little treasures were still there : two little photographs of her aunts and another of the Bamfylde's house hanging against the wall, and a book or two, and her workbox on the drawers. But Eva

said she thought some of her clothes were missing, and the toilet articles were gone.

I went off that morning sadly to office, after seeing Eva—pale, trembling, and almost too nervous to walk down-stairs—set off in the carriage which was to take her to her new home. Two days passed without tidings, as we vainly scanned the newspapers, dreading to see the news we half expected to find there. On the third day I sent for a detective.

The man came at once, hoping, perhaps, that what the new Secretary of State wanted of him might be some big job worthy of his skill ; and he certainly looked disappointed when I told him the object was to find a missing lady's-maid.

"You see, we cannot help fearing the poor girl may have made away with herself, and I want you to get the earliest information of the sort, you understand ?"

"I understand, sir, but I don't think you need be any ways afraid about her having committed suicide. When young women means to throw themselves into the Regent's Canal, or the like of that, they doesn't mostly take a brush and comb and two set of spare underclothing with them."

I could not help thinking for the moment what evil days those must come upon, who had need of a detective for their own family business. The man was respectable looking and civil, and meant well enough, but his coarse professional way of talking

about even a poor servant-maid jarred on the feelings.

"But you see," I argued, "the girl had misbehaved seriously, and had been found fault with perhaps for the first time in her life, and she was thoroughly ashamed of herself, and there is no saying how this might not have acted on her mind." And I told the man somewhat more fully than before what had happened.

"Thank you, sir," he said, when the story was finished; "I think I shall be able to get on the clue pretty soon. You are sure the young woman has not gone back to her home, you said, sir?"

"Yes, I think we may be quite sure of that. She was an orphan, and had only one place to go to, and she has not been heard of there." For it happened Eva had received that morning one of Miss Barton's letters, a circumstance that occurred about once in six weeks, and so remarkable an occurrence as the girl's return to Leatherby would certainly have been mentioned.

"Well, sir, I shall wait upon you again as soon as I have any news to report; and although I can't of course speak positive beforehand, I don't think it'll be very long, sir, before you hear of me again."

The same evening when I came home to dinner, the man was waiting my arrival in the dining-room; apparently it would not have been consistent with his mysterious calling to stand in the hall.

"Well," I said, "have you been able to obtain any news already?"

"Yes, sir," he answered, "and if I may take the liberty of saying so, it's lucky for us who are employed in this line that the jobs we have on hand ain't often altogether quite such plain sailing as this one, else there wouldn't be much work for us detectives left to do. Yes, sir, it's just as I calculated it would be when you told me the rights of the case this morning. She's gone along with the young man."

"What young man?"

"Him as was dismissed from his place just before she ran away."

"And where have they gone?"

"Not very far, sir. It ain't a couple of miles off where we are standing. He's been and took a lodging till he gets another place."

"Then he has married her, do you suppose?"

"Not he, sir. Matrimony ain't much in his line, I expect. No, sir, I daresay he have played the girl false with promises and such like, but he ain't a-married her, and don't mean to, you may depend. You didn't get much of a character with that young man I 'xpect—did you, sir?"

"I am afraid I was rather careless in that respect; and he had been with me only a short time."

"Well, sir, he ain't a nice young man, by no manner of means, that's certain. I haven't had time

to hear much about him yet, but I have found out that much."

"I wonder if we could get to see the poor girl at once."

"That you could, sir, I don't doubt. She's at her place alone, too; the young man's a-gone down to Sydenham to look after a sitiuation, and won't be back till late."

I thought for a moment what was best to be done. Dinner was ready, and there was a heavy press of work to be gone into afterwards; but this job might be got through quickly, and the duty was plain. As soon as Eva could be got ready, and first prevailing on her to take a little wine to restore her trembling nerves, we started in a cab—Boucher, the detective, on the box.

The place we were in search of was in a shabby back street, although turning immediately out of a very good one. The cab stopped at a house, a small huckster's shop, and assisting Eva to alight, so agitated that she could hardly stand, we followed our conductor up two flights of dingy stairs which appeared to be those of a lodging-house, and used by a number of people. "Here we are, sir," said our guide, when we had reached the top floor, and gave a gentle rap at the door.

It was opened by Annette herself, who, recognising the detective, stepped back to allow him to enter, evidently holding him in awe. We followed him

into the room, and at sight of us the poor girl stood speechless in the middle, changing to red and white by turns, her eyes downcast, her hands folded, the fingers nervously pulling at each other.

There was silence for a moment, during which I had time to note that the room was their only one, and that it was a poor one, although cleaner than the staircase; also that the girl seemed to have changed in these three days. There was a trace of the slattern already.

"Annette," said Eva at last, "we are so sorry you went away like this; it was very wrong of you, you know, and very sad; but we are not come to scold you, but are come to take you back and try and make you good again."

At the sound of Eva's gentle voice the poor girl looked up wistfully for a moment, and then burst into tears, covering her face with her little apron, not speaking, but shaking her head mournfully as if it could not be.

Upon this our conductor interposed as mediator. "See," said he, in a would-be coaxing voice, "how kind the lady and gentleman are, my dear; 'tisn't everybody as would be willing to let bygones be bygones so easy. So don't stand thinking twice about such an offer, if you're a wise girl, but just put up your things and come along with us at once. Or, for the matter of that," he added in a low tone, confidentially, "if she will just step along of you,

ma'am, I'll see to what she leaves behind; 'taint very much neither," he added by way of soliloquy, looking to where a dress and a little hat were hanging against the wall.

I could not stand this, so interrupted him by saying—

"Yes, Annette, your mistress and I mean what we say. Come home with us and you may yet be saved from further ruin." And I had a plan in my head at the moment for warding off the disgrace of her fall without bringing her back to her old place about my wife.

Annette lifted her head for a moment, and looked at us as if to see whether our faces showed pity in keeping with our words.

"Yes, Annette," I continued, "we are almost as sorry as you can be. Come," I added, "don't wait for anything, but come back at once as you are. You will never be sorry afterwards if you do what is right now."

"Think of Hannah and the others at home," pleaded Eva; "how can we write and tell them that you are gone from us for ever in this way?"

The poor girl made a move forward as if to take Eva's hand, and I believe she was on the point of making her choice to return with us, but at this moment her companion, who had come up the stairs unperceived, entered the room. He too seemed to have altered for the worse already, now that the

restraint of service was off. The fellow looked as if he had been drinking, although not quite drunk.

"Very much obliged to you I am sure, sir, for this visit," he said, with mock humility, after looking round the room for a few moments; "but I should have taken it still kinder if you'd let us poor folks alone; I haven't asked for nothink of you, nor I don't want nothink of you."

"Come, young man," said our conductor, eyeing him sternly, "none of this, if you please."

"You come yourself," replied the man, turning round angrily towards him; "what do *you* want here? The gentleman and lady may come if they choose, and stay if they choose, but you haven't no business here, and so perhaps you'll just hook it."

"You had better take care, young man," retorted Boucher, "or you'll get yourself into trouble. Perhaps you don't know who I am."

"I don't know who you are, and I don't care who you are. I haven't been a-stealing of anythink from the gentleman's house; no more hasn't my young woman, as I know of. Stealing! why she've been and left all her own things, gowns and such-like as the lady knows she gave her; the more fool she for doing so, I say."

"You've been kidnapping the young woman, at any rate, which I should be sorry to say there's nothing worse against you, and that's bad enough you'll find, if you don't take care."

"Kidnapping the young woman!" answered the other savagely, "that's a lie, and you know it. The young woman came of herself, didn't you, Nan? and she may go of herself too, if she likes. I don't want her to stay, if she don't want to stay. Let her go, if she likes to go, and they as likes to have a bastard in the house are welcome to it, for anything *I* care."

The poor girl turned round with mute imploring face towards the fellow as he spoke, and I perceived then that her figure betrayed what his threat implied. She must have run away as much for shame at her condition as for any other feeling. A mistress more observant would have noticed it sooner.

The man was getting more excited, and the scene must be brought to a close. "Annette," I said, "you can't really want to stay. Don't be afraid to do what is best, even now. You will be glad for it ever after."

Annette looked up with a frightened glance at the man, and making a step backward, further away from us, shook her head mournfully, and then turning away began to sob violently. The man stood silent, scowling defiance at the detective.

As we returned from our fruitless errand, Eva overwrought with the excitement of the scene, myself depressed by the failure, I could not help accusing myself of not having done enough to carry my point. Already, in these few days, all trace of the lover had

disappeared, and only the brute remained. What misery, I thought, must await a woman at the mercy of this drunken ruffian ! And I was very desirous of making another effort to recover the girl.

My old friend Mr Patterson, however, whom I consulted next day, was very strong that the affair should be concluded by a marriage. "I confess this does not seem the happiest solution," I said. "It is simply handing her over to a life of wretchedness." "Better that than a disreputable one," said the old gentleman ; "they can separate afterwards if they don't agree, and it will leave her *quasi* respectable. You can't have her in your house as things go ; her friends wouldn't receive her ; and a young woman with an encumbrance of this sort would be a very troublesome charge for a busy Secretary of State to dispose of."

The matter was not, however, so easy to settle, for the scoundrel, on learning what we were after, stood out for terms. A wife, he said, was a great encumbrance to a man in service ; and eventually Mr Patterson paid him a hundred guineas on the conclusion of the marriage ceremony, which was witnessed by one of his clerks. Shortly after Gates and his wife disappeared from our knowledge.

"I do not wonder, my dear sir," said Mr Patterson, when recounting his last interview with the man, "at your repugnance to the marriage ; the fellow is certainly a thorough bad lot."

“And yet he was a very presentable servant, and certainly a good-looking fellow ; it was when he was in liquor that his bad qualities came out.”

“Ah, then, I think I must have always seen him in liquor,” replied the old gentleman, drily.

It was not until the marriage was concluded that I wrote an account of the affair to Leatherby, Eva being quite unequal to the task. Long private letters would not, under any circumstances, have been a congenial occupation for an overworked Minister, who had to count time by the minute. The subject being what it was, I confess I never felt smaller than when reporting the calamity for the information of our humble friends in aunt Emily’s household.

Eva, indeed, was thoroughly upset by this domestic tragedy, her nerves shaken, her strength gone. For some weeks she remained in a state of depression, listless and languid, and disinclined even for society. But the effect of the shock wore off by degrees ; and when the season began in the spring, she seemed, although delicate and languid, to enter with her usual zest into the course of amusement which made up the business of her life.

CHAPTER LXV.

A NEW REFORM LEAGUE.

THE days flew apace. Slowly, perhaps, for the many, watching with anxious suspense or hopeful excitement, according to temperament, the shifting phases of the European crisis, but more than quickly for those who were charged with providing for the safety of the country. Most times it seemed during those days as if no degree of vigour in preparation could suffice to avert the storm, and that the next step after setting ourselves in battle array must be to put the mettle of our armour to the proof. But ever and anon a gleam of sunshine would brighten up the political landscape, and in the ever-changing aspect of foreign politics, there came up an occasional vision of peace in the future, and readjustment of European affairs on a stable basis. Mr Braham, who as Foreign Secretary had better information than anybody else, was always hopeful of a peaceful solution of the crisis ; but if anything would bring about that result, he said, it would be the promptitude and completeness

of our military preparations, and his advice was ever to do the business thoroughly and with speed, advice repeated by the Premier and echoed by the Cabinet. The nation, too, if less well informed, was yet of the same mind, unanimous and enthusiastic. Equally so the press as representing it; and the cordial appreciation exhibited on all sides of our measures was the best stimulus a Minister could receive. The effect of these measures was indeed already becoming plain; for although the public might not perceive at once the bearings of our various administrative changes, and even in these days of enthusiasm there were not wanting prophets to foretell failure, still there were facts accomplished which could not be gainsaid: the progress in the works of defence; the new arsenal rising in the north; above all, the drilling of the new reserve levies, and the alacrity with which recruits came forward under the new conditions of service.

Nor was the administrative work making less progress, if not so generally apparent. Although the spectacle of the numerous committees at work on this part of the business gave an appearance of confusion to our proceedings, it was an appearance only. These committees were not deliberative bodies propounding terms or offering advice. It was their business merely to give practical effect to the principles of reform laid down for their guidance, the central authority exercising general supervision, and

revising the draft regulations which they prepared, to bring them into harmony with each other, and prevent the introduction of conflicting rules. This plan, in fact, conduced most effectively to despatch in pushing on the great work. Every week saw definite advance made in the process of decentralising—the peeling off, as it were, of some branch of the great overgrown office, which thereon took root of its own as a separate department. In fact the War Office at this time somewhat resembled the spectacle familiar to childhood, of the performer at a horsemanship who enters in guise of a bloated farmer or other corpulent person more or less inebriated, and struggling on to a horse, proceeds to strip off one set of garments after another, till eventually he becomes transformed into a slim British sailor waving a diminutive banner, and beating “Rule Britannia” with his feet as the steed winds up with a final gallop round the circus. We, too, with the development of this great reform, began to feel more slim and active every day, and in better case for waving the British banner with fit alacrity in the face of our enemies whether at home or abroad.

Meanwhile, too, the work of reorganising the combatant branch was making good progress. The first thing needful had been, of course, to recruit the raw material, which part of the business was put in hand from the day our Ministry came into power, Parliament at once voting the men and money; but although no time could be spared for preliminary dis-

cussion before making a beginning, it was not the less necessary that the change of organisation should be based on a complete and comprehensive plan, while it was very desirable to secure the cordial co-operation of the head of the army, and that if possible the initiation of the various detailed proposals for giving effect to it should appear to emanate from him rather than from the Secretary of State, since great weight would deservedly be attached, both by the army and the public, to any proposal put forward in his name. Fortunately this distinguished officer combined tact in a remarkable degree with his other eminent qualifications, thoroughly understanding also the working of Parliamentary government, and the need for economy in any scheme intended to last; and accordingly, after some personal discussion, in which it appeared that the Commander-in-Chief was quite prepared to look at things in a congenial light, he undertook to prepare a detailed scheme for the approval of the Government, and within the week had fulfilled his promise, and had placed his memorandum on the subject in my hands. His concurrence was indeed almost more complete than I could have hoped for.

“What do you think of our new Chief’s scheme?” I asked my private secretary, after he had read through the memorandum.

“Quite first-rate,” replied Strickland, “but it seems like an old friend; I think I have seen something

uncommonly like it before, and in my own handwriting. In fact, if not quite a verbatim copy, I don't see that his paper varies in a single material point from the last memorandum we drew up together."

"Could anything be more satisfactory? Instead of having the Commander-in-Chief in opposition, we have got him entirely with us, and so strengthened all difficulties vanish."

"Very true; still he might have had the grace to acknowledge the source of his ideas. Anybody reading this memorandum might suppose that all these plans had originated in his own brain. It is the most complete case of administrative piracy I ever heard of."

"Well paid for by the results. Provided the orchestra plays in tune, anybody may beat the drums who likes that style of music. After all, Ministers pick other people's brains freely enough without acknowledgment; so this is merely retribution."

The Commander-in-Chief having thus entered into our views heartily—so heartily, indeed, as quite to appropriate them as his own—it was agreed that they should be discussed with one or two officers of standing, whose criticisms should be invited on points of detail, and through whom a knowledge of what was contemplated would find its way out of doors, and prepare the army and the public for the coming changes. Accordingly, General Sir Thomas Pyghed, father of my friend Colonel Pyghed of the 110th, a

fine old soldier of the old school ; General Peddant, famous for his knowledge of drill and regulations ; and Sir Prinseps Arme, an eminent artilleryman—were invited, with one or two other distinguished officers, to attend a meeting to be held for the purpose. Two other visitors invited were Colonel Kaville, whom, as being an M.P. and a clever fellow much given to asking troublesome questions in the House, it would be useful to carry with us ; and Lord Quheerie, the eldest son of a Scotch earl, also an M.P., who was a colonel of volunteers, and a great authority on military matters. These, with Strickland, Lord Neeofite the new Under-Secretary, Bilancoo the new Paymaster-General, and various of the higher officials of the office, made up the party assembled round the long table in my room—the same table which had witnessed my discomfiture on the occasion of my first efforts at reform—and to whom the Commander-in-Chief, who sat on my right, adjusting his double eyeglass on his nose, in this respect only resembling Lord Stowe (for he too was an elderly man), proceeded to read his memorandum.

“In communicating the contents of this paper,” he began, “which I am happy to find has the approval of the Right Honourable the Secretary of State”—here my distinguished friend, who had rolled out this phrase with great unction, bowed towards me for corroboration, and I bowed in return, while Strickland, who sat on my left, appeared disposed to smile,

but recovered himself by scribbling figures on his blotting-paper—"in communicating the contents of this paper, I may begin by postulating three propositions. It is of no use going into war nowadays with a small army. It is out of the question maintaining a large embodied army. Further, having an organised force like the militia, it is absurd to limit its usefulness to employment at home. To do so is as much as to say that you will never exert your strength except within your own shores, the worst place to employ it—since the essence of sound defensive war is in a vigorous offensive, rather than in waiting to be invaded. If these data be admitted, then the principle on which our army organisation should be based becomes plain. Instead of augmenting the permanent army during this crisis, we have applied ourselves to forming a strong reserve of young soldiers to be embodied only during war—these are the men now drilling all over the kingdom. Further, a fusion is to be carried out of the militia with the line, the present depot centres being converted into the headquarters of the new amalgamated regiments.

"As a matter of detail, I may mention that these centres are to be increased in number from 66 to 74. For this reason. We propose to maintain the existing number of companies of infantry as the fixed establishment for both peace and war, the change from the one state to the other being effected by increasing the rank and file of each

company from the reserves. Each regiment is to consist of two embodied battalions, one of which will usually be abroad, and may be left out of consideration as not available for sudden war, with a skeleton depot battalion, corresponding, in fact, to the present depot centre. Now the reserves of a regiment will be of a strength sufficient to bring up the home and depot battalions, which in peace will be 600 and 200 strong respectively, to 900 rank and file each ; in other words, the part of the regiment at home, and therefore available for active service, will be capable of immediate augmentation from 800 to 1800. Now, assuming the proper strength of a company to be 150 in war and 100 in peace (the depot companies would of course be much smaller), then each battalion would consist of six, and each regiment of eighteen, companies. The existing number of companies of the line being 1330, these will make up 74 regiments of the new organisation, and accordingly it is proposed to fix the establishment of regiments of infantry at that number."

"Then," exclaimed Sir Thomas Pyghed, "I understand that you propose actually to reduce thirty-five regiments of the line?"

"That is part of our scheme," replied the expounder of the measure. "Whether for war or peace, the existing number of separate regiments is quite in excess of the wants of the country. We are nearly on the same footing in that respect as the French and

Germans with their million of men each. Up to this time, when regimental organisation was the only thing in the way of organisation which our army could boast of, there might have been ground for scruples about touching the individual regimental unit ; and when the British troops were scattered in detachments all over the world, and our only notion of warfare was to carry out small predatory expeditions, there was a certain amount of reason and convenience in maintaining a large number of independent units. But now, when so much additional outlay has to be incurred in other ways, we are bound to economise wherever economy is possible. Besides, as you will see when we proceed further, the whole system of organisation now proposed is built up on the regiment as a unit, and it could not be worked out properly with a larger number than we have allowed."

"Well," said Sir Thomas Pyghed, with a sigh, "if it must be it must, I suppose. But how do you make the reduction ? By lopping off all the regiments above number 74 ? There goes my colonelcy for one."

"No ; we make a selection. Here is a list of those to be broken up, after approval given in the proper quarter. You will see that we retain all the Highland regiments, as well as those which have been specially distinguished, including," said the speaker with a smile and bow, "the one which enjoys the honour of having Sir Thomas Pyghed for its colonel

—without reference to their place on the list. Those which are retained will then be renumbered from one to seventy-four.

“This is not the first reduction of the kind,” he continued. “At the close of the Seven Years’ War, the regiments of the line had been brought up to no less than 115, a preposterous number, of course—but hardly more disproportioned to the conditions of the time than our present establishment of 109 regiments. 45 of these regiments were reduced at the peace in 1763. This,” added the speaker, jocosely, “is among the things not generally known.” After which little lesson in history poor Pyghed appeared to be quite shut up.

“Now,” continued our spokesman, “as to the composition of an infantry regiment on the new scale. You see that it will consist of three battalions of the line, as above stated, and two of associated militia; the whole commanded by a colonel. Each active battalion is to have two field officers, a lieutenant-colonel and major; the depot battalion will be commanded by a major. Thus, including the present lieutenant-colonels commanding depot centres, who in many cases will become the colonels of the new regiments, the number of infantry field officers will be nearly the same as at present, as well as the number of captains. It is intended that an active battalion shall have—1 lieutenant-colonel, 1 major, 6 captains, 12 subalterns: and the depot battalion,

1 major, 6 captains, 6 subalterns. The establishment of a whole regiment will therefore be,—

1 Colonel.

2 Lieutenant-colonels.

3 Majors.

19 Captains (one Adjutant-major).

30 Subalterns.

Besides these there will be the two militia battalions, each with 1 lieutenant-colonel, 1 major, 6 captains, and 6 subalterns, all of whom will eventually be retired line officers transferred from the active battalions.

“Such being the regimental organisation, now for the scheme of mobilisation—in other words, for the conversion of a small peace establishment into a large war army—a thing which has to be done out of hand. Our position differs from that of Continental nations in that we have a large colonial army, and we cast about at first for some scheme for relieving the battalions on foreign service by militia, and so making these seasoned troops available for the seat of war. But no plan of this sort seemed practicable, for most of these foreign battalions are in India, and there would not be time to bring them back. War, if it comes, will be sharp, short, and decisive; besides, troops coming from a tropical climate would hardly be fit for the roughing of a European campaign. Clearly, then, the battalions on foreign service must be left out of calculation, and we must look only to

the troops at home for our available force. What therefore we have arranged for is this:—

“On the word being given for mobilisation, the active battalions at home, wherever they may be, are to join their regimental headquarters at once, when they and the depot battalions will at once be brought up to 900 strong each by calling up the reserves. Simultaneously with this, one battalion of militia is to be embodied, and to become the depot. You have thus at once for your first line seventy-four regiments 1800 strong, or over 130,000 infantry, besides the Guards and Rifles. The next step, if the emergency demanded it, would be to embody the second militia battalion, and from the two to make up a third active battalion, which—and in this lies another of the novel points of our scheme—could be sent forward to join the first line. This would give us an embodied regiment of 2700 men, with a depot of 900 to feed it, or 200,000 infantry without the Guards and Rifles. That is about the number we ought to be able to handle effectively, at any rate on first starting; while, with less than that number, we had better keep out of war altogether.

“This, therefore, is the general scheme for mobilisation. We keep up only about 60,000 infantry embodied at home, but we can increase the strength fourfold when necessary,—every man of the addition being available for service wherever needed. That is our platform,” concluded the speaker jocosely, and

looking round the table, "a small army in peace, a large one in war."

"That is all very well," objected Colonel Kaville, "but where are these reserves to come from? That is just the difficulty. Anybody can organise reserves when you have got them, but the thing is to get them."

"My right honourable friend and I," replied the Commander-in-Chief, "believe that we have solved this problem by that part of our plan which forms the most original feature of it—the creation of a new reserve of young men, who serve merely long enough to be drilled, and then return to civil life till wanted. Of course no plan which is based on a reserve of old soldiers can give you a large reserve, so long as the army which supplies them is a small army. Of the 1000 men required per regiment to bring it up to the war strength, we calculate that only about 300 will consist of old soldiers, and that our new plan will give us the other 700. The alacrity with which our new reserves are enrolling themselves all over the country, under the attractive terms we have offered, is sufficient proof of the efficacy of the plan."

"That is all very well," replied Kaville, "during the present excitement, when men are ready enough to rush to arms, no doubt; but how are you to be sure of keeping up the supply when the country settles down again to its normal condition?"

"By paying the market price of the article. What

that may prove to be eventually can only be ascertained on trial; but we see no reason why the present bait of a shilling a-day should not continue to prove sufficiently attractive. If it prove not to be, we must bid higher; but since a reserve man will thus get seven shillings a-week, with no obligation, save occasional muster and drill, beyond the liability to serve in the event of a war, the terms ought to be very attractive. They would make to thousands the difference between penury and comfort. We ought for this to get the pick of the labouring classes."

"An expensive scheme," still objected Kaville, when the Commander-in-Chief paused awhile, and looked round the table for comments.

"About two and a half millions sterling a-year, from which you must deduct a part of the cost of our present reserve force—surely a mere trifle for giving the country what it has never had before, a large army ready to your hand, available at a day's notice. Why, it would cost as much to add 20,000 or 30,000 men to the permanent establishment according to customary formula, an addition perfectly useless for the purposes of modern war. We must pay something if England is not to go to the wall. It seems to me to be quite a trifle compared with the object in view."

"My objection," said General Peddant, "if I may venture to offer one, is not to the cost, but to the insufficiency of the scheme. You want to make war

on a grand scale, if you make it at all, no doubt ; and what are you to do it with ? With a lot of raw boors, hastily called up, who have had only a few months' training ? ”

“ A year's training, if you please,” I observed.

“ Well, a year's training, but in the case of the majority a long time previously. How can a battalion of men called up suddenly in this way be efficient ? And without good non-commissioned officers too.”

“ The A reserve, all old soldiers, would furnish the non-commissioned officers.”

“ Still on the whole it would be quite a raw force ; the trained element would be swamped by the raw.”

“ If you mean that reserve troops may not be quite up to the mark of old soldiers who have been five or six years with the colours, of course every one would agree with you. But the question is really between having an army of this sort, and not having one at all. A highly-trained army, if it is also a small one, is simply useless in the present state of Europe, and a large one permanently embodied is not to be thought of. We want a big army, and we want a cheap one, and the problem, it seems to us, can only be solved in this sort of way. After all, a man who has been well trained for a year will soon fall into shape again ; and remember that your officers are experts, and in my belief,” I added, “ the best in the world.”

"But where are the officers to come from? You have provided no war establishment of them."

"The scheme gives a field officer to every three companies, and a captain to every company of 150 men. A German company is 250 strong."

"Yes, but you will be very short of subalterns. You allow only six for the depot battalion, or only one per company; the Prussians have four."

"That is during peace time. The subalterns will be mostly with the active battalions, because best employed there. They, too, would be redistributed, of course, on the mobilisation taking place."

"That is merely to render the active battalions inefficient also. Besides, how as to the subalterns in India?"

"They would have to remain there. Yes, you have hit on a weak point, no doubt, but it has been foreseen, and a plan provided to cover it. It is out of the question keeping up a war establishment of subalterns in peace time sufficient for the reserves. Even if the plan were not too costly, they would block up promotion, and, moreover, would have nothing to do in peace. We propose, therefore, while maintaining the full strength of superior officers in peace time, to reduce the proportion of subalterns; but to meet the demand for additional officers if the reserves are called up, we propose also to give a certain number of *provisional* commissions to gentlemen volunteers as lieutenants to each line

regiment, on the nomination of the lord lieutenant of the county, but subject to the approval of the colonel, and the needful qualifications as to drill and education being strictly enforced. These commissions to have no force during peace time, but to become permanent in the event of war."

"So that," interrupted Peddant, "you begin the war with a lot of officers as raw as the men they have to lead, and the two complete strangers to each other."

"This must happen in any case after you have been at war any time. Military education may be as elaborate as you please in piping peace, but when war comes, there are forthwith augmentations and casualties, and officers are suddenly wanted in great numbers, and so all your rules are set aside, and young men are pitchforked helter-skelter into the army without any regard to rule or qualification. We provide for this contingency beforehand. The fact that the appointments of these young men, made deliberately from time to time during peace, will be subjected to the scrutiny of public criticism, ought to afford a guarantee for proper selection. Besides, this is not the only part of the plan. We propose to give similar provisional commissions to non-commissioned officers. To this class a commission in peace time, which brings them in at the bottom of a long list of subalterns, is often not at-

tractive ; but promotion at the top of a great war augmentation opens up a real career. They ought to be eagerly sought after, and stimulate the class to educate themselves."

"I don't like this plan," said Pyghed. "British troops have always been led by gentlemen, and always should be."

"Good or bad," I observed, "the provision is unavoidable. Now that the army is becoming a national force, so much more numerous than formerly, and attracting, as we hope it will, a more respectable class than heretofore, it is absolutely necessary to open the door to talent in all ranks. It would be intolerable if the army were the only profession in which a man could not hope to rise by merit. My gallant friend proposes, I believe, that thirty-six of these provisional commissions should always be in force for every regiment, so as to provide altogether three subalterns per company for the active, and two per company for the militia battalions. Of these, one-half are to be given to non-commissioned officers, and the other half to gentlemen serving with the volunteers."

There was a pause after this. Then General Peddant spoke. "Won't there be rather a hurry-scurry and confusion when the services of these provisional officers come to be wanted? There will be nearly three thousand of them. Think of the

business it would throw on the War Office at such a time to be sending orders to all these men to join their regiments just when things are busiest."

"There would be no confusion or trouble about the matter whatever. The order to mobilise the army will be the warrant whereby these commissions become *ipso facto* permanent, and the holders of them thereon straightway join regimental headquarters. The War Office would have nothing to do with the matter, which would not go beyond the colonels of regiments."

"Then," said Pyghed, "supposing war never breaks out, are these provisional officers to remain so for ever?" And I must say I thought the question a very sensible one.

"A provisional commission," replied the Commander-in-Chief, "will have force for seven years then a new one is issued to a younger man, and so a constant stream of fresh blood will be secured."

"And what if they should happen to be called out during their term of office?"

"Then *ipso facto* they become permanent officers, and just as much an integral part of the regiment as those who entered it in the regular way."

"And then," said Lord Quheerie, "what becomes of them when the war is over? You will have about three times as many subalterns as you want."

"Then, no doubt, reductions will have to take

place, as they would in any case on the return to a peace establishment ; but each officer's claims to retention would rest upon his conduct and services during the war, irrespective of the way in which he came to enter the army."

"Think of the cost of putting so many men on half-pay."


"You can't go to war without spending money. But it is cheaper to disband and reduce, than to go on keeping up a full war establishment of officers in peace time."

"Now," resumed the Commander-in-Chief, "having determined the number and strength of our regiments of the line, the next thing is to build up the administrative organisation upon them. We think that generally the distribution should be by threes ; three battalions to a regiment, three regiments to a brigade, three brigades to a division. If you organise by pairs, as in the German army, the generals have not enough to do in peace time, nor is the distribution good for active service, as it does not admit of one regiment or one brigade being detached without practically breaking up a command in each case. Hence our preference for threes. Now sixty-six regiments will have only two battalions serving at home, one active and one depot ; these will accordingly be organised by threes, in twenty-two brigades. The remaining eight regiments, which will have both active battalions at home, or three battalions altogether, are to

be organised in four brigades of only two regiments. The Guards make another brigade of six battalions, a third or depot battalion being given to the Coldstream and Scots Fusilier regiments. There will thus be twenty-seven brigades in all for the United Kingdom, to be organised in nine divisions."

"And these, again, in three army corps, I suppose?" said General Peddant.

"No, we propose to stop there. An army corps of that size would be unwieldy, and unsuited to the conditions of the country. The Irish garrison, for example, would make up only part of such a corps, which would obviously be inconvenient. Besides, there would be nothing for the commander of it to do in peace time. We propose, therefore, to make the division the highest administrative unit. Every division will be complete in itself as to organisation, staff, equipment, stores, and transport. Whether an army should consist of two, or three, or more divisions, must depend on the nature of the theatre of war in each case. We assume, however, that if all the nine divisions took the field, they would be divided into three armies each 60,000 or 90,000 strong, according as the militia were in the line of battle or not. But this is a tactical, not an administrative organisation. The British army division will be like the German army corps, a self-contained army; and all that seems necessary for the completion of the arrangement is, that the three generals who



are to command armies in the event of war, and their staffs, should be designated beforehand. This we propose to do by a system of provisional commissions, to take effect only on mobilisation being decreed."

"You allow only four generals for a division of 30,000 men," said Peddant; "surely they are too few?"

"The German organisation certainly provides seven infantry generals for the same number of men, but then you must remember that our army division, without the militia, will be only 20,000 strong. At any rate, the number proposed will be ample in peace time, and it will be easy to increase it if necessary in war. Hitherto we have always had too many generals, getting in each other's way. The whole number of generals employed in peace time will, however, be much larger than at present, although the establishment generally is to be immensely reduced.

"Now," continued the Commander-in-Chief, "for our scheme of distribution. There are, as I have said, to be nine permanent military divisions, with twenty-seven brigades, in the United Kingdom, among which the active battalions serving at home will always be distributed during peace time in equal proportions. Now these battalions must usually be separated from the headquarters of their respective regiments, which are to be distributed over the coun-

try, as are the present depot centres, with reference mainly to recruiting purposes and not to strategical considerations. Thus there can be little correspondence between the location of the headquarters of regiments and that of the new military divisions. To establish such a correspondence you would need to post the generals away from the bulk of the active battalions, and many of them would have brigades made up merely of depots. Take Aldershot, for example; this will be a complete army division as at present, with nine battalions organised in three brigades. But these battalions belong to different regiments, the permanent headquarters of which are in various parts of the kingdom; and further, they are relieved every year by fresh battalions, in order to give the whole army a turn of camp life. The German plan of retaining each division permanently in its own recruiting district is therefore not applicable to our case, to meet the conditions of which we propose the following arrangement.

“The headquarters of every brigade and division to be permanent, and every regiment to have also a war or mobilised headquarters, designated beforehand, but not necessarily, and probably not the same, as its permanent one in peace time. Thus nine regiments will have their war headquarters at Aldershot, and so on for the other eight military divisions. Now suppose war to be imminent, and the word given to mobilise. The battalions which happen to be

stationed at the time at Aldershot thereon move off instantly to their respective permanent regimental headquarters, while simultaneously the colonel of each regiment calls up his reserves and embodies his militia battalions. On the arrival of the active battalion at regimental headquarters the needful distribution of subalterns and non-commissioned officers is made, as well as of the provisional officers ; and the whole regiment made up to a war footing, with the colonel at the head of it, then marches off to join its proper war brigade. Thus Aldershot would be denuded of its infantry for a few days, and then nine complete regiments would march in from different parts of the kingdom. The same thing would happen at Dover, Portsmouth, and all the other places which are headquarters of brigades."

"Would there not be a certain amount of confusion about all this marching and countermarching?" objected one of the party.

"There should not be, because everybody would know beforehand exactly what to do, and no specific orders would be necessary."

"But think of the movement to and fro on the railways that this would involve."

"And think of the carrying power of our railways. We propose, of course, to apply for an Act of Parliament to give us powers of control over railway traffic, on mobilisation being declared ; and the needful supervising officers will all be told off to regulate

this part of the traffic. But why have fears that we shall fail in what is just our strong point? Do not our railways carry an amount of traffic, often expanding suddenly almost without warning, under which the lumbering foreign system would utterly collapse? What Continental traffic manager would know how to work up to the pressure of a Derby day? Only provide the needful organisation, and no people are cooler and readier under pressure than ourselves."

"Another and greater objection to this plan," said Peddant, "is that when you have mobilised the army in this way, the regiments and the staff which is to control them will be quite strangers to each other. You shift all the component parts of your brigades and divisions just at the moment when personal knowledge would be most useful."

"Not quite so, in one sense at least, because the distribution is all made beforehand. Every regiment knows what brigade it will belong to if called on active service; each general knows exactly what troops will be placed under his orders in the same event. Here is a distinct bond of union set up, although there may be no personal intercourse. After all, that personal familiarity produced by the complete localisation practised in the German army, cannot be maintained in any case beyond the mere outset of a war. The first battle makes changes—general and staff officers are killed or promoted, and

new men take their places. Better, then, anticipate the rough-and-ready conditions which will have to be actually encountered, than frame a too rigid scheme, which cannot be sustained in practice."

"And what is proposed as to the manœuvring unit?" asked Lord Quheerie. "Are regiments to work by whole battalions nine hundred strong?"

"No," said the Commander-in-Chief; "the new drill-book, which will be ready in a fortnight, will be found, I hope, to give a system quite flexible enough to suit the times. Battalions are still to manœuvre by wings. Thus a division will have three brigades, a brigade three regiments, a regiment two (or three) battalions, a battalion two wings, a wing three companies, 150 strong. Manœuvring with these small units, 450 strong, our army should be capable of moving as rapidly as any troops in Europe."

"But you have allowed only two field officers to a battalion?"

"Yes, a lieutenant-colonel and a major."

"Then is the lieutenant-colonel to handle one wing, and the major the other?"

"No; the former will look after the whole battalion; one of the two wings must be commanded by the senior captain. By the way, the second, or depot battalion, will be commanded by a major, so that both wings in that battalion will be under captains."

"Then their companies will be led by subalterns?"

"Yes."

"It is rather hard that men who are doing the work of field officers should not get the rank and pay."

"The Germans," I observed, "allow only one field officer for a thousand men; so the proportion we have given is much more liberal. Anyhow, the scheme must not be less reasonable on this head if Parliament is to agree to it. Besides, it would never do to keep up a lot of field officers in peace time with no occupation for them off parade. If war broke out, then the senior captains could be promoted, if thought necessary, or provisional commissions might be given to them and the senior lieutenants in the higher grade, to be converted into substantive ones on the declaration of war. This perhaps would be the best arrangement. The more completely everything is provided for beforehand the better; but for a peace establishment the provision allowed is full liberal."

"Now," continued the Commander-in-Chief, "for the cavalry.

"First let me explain what it is proposed to do with the two Rifle regiments. These now consist each of four battalions of ten companies or forty companies. We organise each regiment in seven battalions of six companies each, making fourteen

battalions in all. Of these one battalion will be attached to each military division, and two (one for each regiment) will act as permanent depots, leaving three for foreign service. Thus only one-fourth of the Rifles would be serving abroad ; it would therefore be a favoured branch.

“Now as regards the cavalry. We want a brigade of three regiments for each military division, or 27 regiments in all, and there are only 31 in the service, of which 9 are now in India, these last being numerically very weak, and consequently on a very expensive footing. We therefore recall five of them, and raise the remainder to six strong squadrons each. The Indian Government will therefore have in effect eight cheap instead of nine dear regiments, and will be thankful for the change.

“The 27 regiments on home service are to be retained at present strength in peace time, but to be brought up by reserves in war time to seven strong squadrons each, one for depot, six for active service, working in two wings under a full colonel.”

“Where are the additional officers to come from for these extra squadrons ?” asked Colonel Kerville.

“The establishment of officers is to be completed by a system of provisional commissions, though not on quite the same plan as for the infantry. The six extra troops per regiment, for example, would be held by officers on furlough—that is, who have retired from active duty, but are allowed to retain

their names on the list of the regiment for a term of years, on condition of returning to it if their services should be required."

"And who is to look after the reserves? Are the cavalry to have depots like the infantry, or are the regiments to be localised themselves?"

"No, the cavalry cannot be localised; it would not do to leave the same regiments always in Ireland, for example. The cavalry will move about from place to place as heretofore, but one of the three regiments composing each war brigade is always to be stationed within the division to which it is assigned on the war establishment, and the reserve men of the brigade will join that regiment for drill, and be supervised by the brigade staff, the headquarters of which will of course be permanent."

"You will never have an efficient cavalry in that way," objected Kaville, who was himself an ex-officer of hussars.

"Then it must be inefficient," retorted the Commander-in-chief. "It is out of the question keeping up a war establishment of the most expensive arm in peace time. Better have 25,000 imperfect cavalry than a handful of the best in the world. Bear in mind that cavalry may go through a whole war without having much actual fighting to do. They are mostly wanted for other work. Remember, too, that we are not preparing a scheme theoretically perfect, but such a one as the War Minister and the

House of Commons are likely to pass. But I don't agree that you cannot make a decent cavalry man in a year.

"However, now to pass on to the artillery. Well, here what we principally want is an increase of field-guns, and a reduction of garrison artillery—the aggregate strength of the regiment being sufficient for all purposes if the militia artillery are made proper use of. We propose 12 horse-artillery guns and 48 field-guns for each military division, or 60 guns in all, giving a total, with the depots, of rather more than 600 field-guns for the home army."

"That," said General Peddant, "will give you about three guns per 1000 men, when the infantry of the line are called up, but only about half that number when the militia are mobilised."

"And quite enough, too," broke in the Chief of the Staff. "Guns and waggons take up an awful lot of room on the line of march, which had much better be occupied by infantry. The tendency of the times is to overdo artillery altogether, and it ought to be resisted."

"These are novel sentiments," exclaimed Sir Prinseps Arme, who had been silent up to this point. "I thought that if one thing more than another was clearly established, it was the surpassing importance of artillery in modern warfare."

"There is, I know, a great deal of tall talk of that sort," replied the other; "but I maintain the facts

are quite the other way. Without going so far as the distinguished American general, who said that armies could do without artillery altogether, if the troops could only be got to think so, I certainly believe that in these days of large armies, it is better economy in every way to develop the infantry. It is rifle-fire, after all, which decides the fate of battles."

"Mr West, I am sure, as an old artilleryman, will not agree with you on this point, at any rate," said Sir Prinseps, turning to me.

"I am afraid you will find me almost as great a heretic as the Chief of the Staff," I replied. "If battles are made up of blood and thunder, I suspect the infantry contribute the blood for the most part and the guns the thunder. All the statistics of battles show this. For one man who is hit by artillery-fire, ten men go down under rifle-bullets. Anyhow, we do not see the way to a larger force than 600 field-guns, and we do not propose to keep up all these in peace time. The fact is, our present method of maintaining the field-artillery on a war establishment cannot be justified, although it may have had a certain show of reason at a time when the rest of the army was wholly without organisation or means of sudden augmentation. Guns and gunners could not be improvised, whatever people thought might be done with other parts of the army. But now that we are settling down to a peace and

war establishment on a definite system, the artillery must be dealt with in the same way. What is considered safe for Germany, ought to suffice for us. Batteries in peace time are therefore to have only four out of their six guns horsed, and the present establishment of horses will more than suffice for the increased number of guns. So this part of the change will cost nothing."

"And what will you do for horses if you want to mobilise the army on a sudden?"

"There are said to be over three million horses in the kingdom; we shall buy some of these."

"And where will you get the gunners for your fortifications, if the garrison artillery is to be reduced so largely for conversion into field-batteries?"

"From the militia artillery, of which there will be one regiment to each military division. I may observe that we propose to distribute the regular artillery in the same way as the rest of the army, equally among the nine military divisions; but that is a matter of detail to be deferred till another occasion.

"Well, gentlemen," continued the Commander-in-Chief, "there now only remains to recapitulate the summary of the new scheme as approved by my right honourable friend and the Government." And so saying, he handed round the following abstract statement of the establishment of military forces provided under the new organisation, exclusive of

garrison artillery and of troops serving in India and the colonies :—

Active Embodied Army organised in Nine Military Divisions.	Peace Establishment.	War Establishment	
		Excluding Militia.	Including Militia, one Battalion per Regiment.
1 Regiment of Infantry,	800	1,800	2,700
1 Brigade Infantry=3 Regiments,	2,400	5,400	8,100
1 Division Infantry=3 Brigades,	7,200	16,200	24,300
1 Battalion Rifles,	600	900	900
1 Brigade Cavalry=3 Regiments,	1,050	2,700	2,700
10 Field-Batteries,	1,500	2,000	2,000
4 Companies Engineers,	360	600	600
Total strength of 1 Division,	10,650	22,400	30,500
Strength of 9 Divisions,	95,850	201,600	274,500

“It will be seen from this statement,” he continued, “that while the peace establishment remains much the same as at present, we can augment it at once to 200,000 men in the event of war; and if a militia battalion from each regiment be sent into the first line, there will be an army of 275,000 men ready to take the field, small as armies go nowadays, but enough to be of use in a row, with the help of allies. Besides this, there will be about 80,000 militia in reserve at the depots. Lastly, there will be the volunteers, in case of invasion, which, however, may now be placed out of the category of possible events.”

“Ah, by the way,” said Lord Quheerie, “what do

you propose doing with the volunteers? That is just the point about which I feel most interest."

"To retain them, of course, but with a more specific organisation than they have now. They are to be distributed in large brigades, each commanded by a colonel in the army, to be styled Inspector of Volunteers. We do not propose to carry the organisation beyond the brigade; indeed, even a whole brigade of volunteers can seldom be collected in one place, and these brigades will be wholly separate and distinct from the military commands of the country. The conditions under which volunteers serve render it impracticable, even if it were desirable, to bring them in peace time under the general military system. The mode of employing the volunteer brigades, should their services ever be required, must be determined by the circumstances as they arise. The conversion of the yeomanry into mounted riflemen is to be proceeded with. They crown the edifice, and in their new capacity will be as efficient as they have hitherto been the reverse."

"Well, gentlemen," I said, when, after some further discussion, the meeting came to an end, "the scheme, as now before you, is what the Government propose to submit to Parliament in a very few days as being at once sufficient, efficient, and cheap. It is gratifying to find that it appears to be generally approved by such very competent judges."

"A fine scheme, no doubt," said Sir Thomas Pyg-

hed, as he took leave ; " but, dear me, what between your reserves, and your provisional commissions, and your war establishment, and your peace establishment, and your headquarters here and your headquarters there, and all the rest of it, I should hardly know the army again. In my day, if a regiment lay at Cork, Cork was its headquarters, and not some place at the other end of the kingdom ; and if we wanted more men we used to send out the drums and fifes, and beat up for recruits till we got them. We were always mobilised in these days, and ready to move anywhere at an hour's notice, without wanting any provisional officers, or militia, or suchlike, to help us. However, I suppose it is all right, and as you are going to put all of us old fellows on the shelf, it don't much matter."

" Well," said I to Strickland, when we were left alone, " this meeting has been a success ; if these men of such various minds come into the scheme so readily, it will be sure to take with the country."

" Yes, but the Chief might have had the grace to say where he got his ideas from. Pyghed and the rest of them got away with the notion that the whole scheme is his creation."

" Which is just the best thing about it."

When I showed the memorandum to Merrifield afterwards, he observed that it was a good scheme, but added, after a hurried glance over the table at

the end, that the figures were inaccurate. The brigades had all been set down as homogeneous, but four of them would comprise only two instead of three regiments each.

I said the distinction had been omitted advisedly to avoid complicating the figures, and that the result as regards actual strength would be almost the same in each case.

"Yes," replied Mr Merrifield, "but there is still a blot in your scheme. The eight regiments which have their second battalion serving at home will not be always the same. They will be constantly changing, so that your distribution of brigades will have to be constantly changing too. There is a want of simplicity about this part of it which I don't like."

"Ah," I exclaimed, in a transport of admiration at this fresh illustration of the magical power of mastering details for which my eminent colleague was so distinguished, and which had never been more conspicuous than in his handling of military subjects; "ah, my dear Merrifield, if you had only been Secretary for War yourself! It has been literally throwing yourself away to take the Exchequer in such a crisis."

Mr Merrifield smiled good-humouredly as he replied that the idea had never occurred to him before; but remarked jocosely that in such case the country would at least have had a simple straightforward scheme for getting the number of men we wanted in

the only proper way, without any sentimental nonsense about voluntary service, or foolish complications about A and B reserves, and militia, and what not ; adding, with an air of resignation, that he supposed, however, half a loaf was better than no bread.

Coming into my library later in the afternoon, on my return home, I was greeted with the sound of Eva's gentle laughter. It was not often that she honoured that room with her company ; and these rare occasions were not usually celebrated by merriment. I therefore hurried my steps, curious to know what the cause might be for such unusual sound.

Strickland was sitting at the table in my chair, pencil in hand, Eva looking over his shoulder.

I stopped in the doorway, as if looking for explanation—

"I was trying to convey to Mrs West a notion of this afternoon's meeting," said Strickland, rising, a sheet of paper in his hand, which, however, he did not seem desirous of showing, "but my poor effort comes very short of the original scene."

"How can you say so?" said Eva ; "I am sure it was awfully clever ; you had Sir Thomas Pyghed to the life, and Lord Quheerie and all of them. I never saw a better caricature."

"It is a pity that so much talent should be given to the flames," I said, drily, as Strickland placed the paper on the fire ; "perhaps," I added, after a mo-

ment's pause, "the gentlemen you have named were not the only persons made to look ridiculous."

Eva blushed and looked confused, while Strickland muttered something about some people never making subjects for caricatures.

Except that I had a long nose and was rather thin, I was not aware of there being anything absurd about my appearance ; still I could not help inferring from what passed, that I had been included in the sketch.

Although indisposed to pursue the subject, I felt nettled at the liberty taken ; still more that Eva should find amusement in it, and our *tête-à-tête* after Strickland left passed off coldly in silence. This, perhaps, was not the first time I had been sensible that my private secretary was not quite in his right place. Still, as an old friend, and now a brother M.P., he naturally took up a different position from that which a mere clerk in the same office would have held. Withal, he was so good-natured and so able, as to make up for an occasional want of attention to his proper business. And I thought, too, with a sort of ill-natured satisfaction, that he was not likely to step out of his proper place in Parliament, whatever he might do elsewhere. Notwithstanding his other gifts, he could not speak in public ; and on the only occasion of his attempting to do so in the House a few day previously, had completely broken down.

CHAPTER LXVI.

BREAKING UP OF "THE OLD REGIMENT."

"I CONFESS I should have given you credit for more strength of mind," said my private secretary, on one of these days, as we were pausing to take breath and survey the field of progress in the great measures under execution. "I should have thought that you would have risen superior to the weakness of favouring your own branch of the service."

"As how?"

"Why, when every other part of the army has been taken in hand and reformed, are the gunners to get off scot-free?"

"You speak with all the bitterness of a narrow-minded Guardsman, and as if all the other branches had been worsened instead of bettered by what we have done. But I suppose we ought now to take up the artillery question, as you suggest, although it does not press so much as many others, and the first things needful, the extra field-guns wanted, have already been provided." And accordingly

the artillery organisation question was now taken up.

In doing this we followed the same method as before. The plan to be adopted was first arranged upon with the Commander-in-Chief; and then Sir Princeps Arme and other distinguished officers of the regiment were invited to discuss it, His Excellency acting as spokesman on our side, and assuming the parentage of the scheme we had determined on. In this way the views which, if put forward by a young and inexperienced Secretary of State, would certainly have been exposed to hostile and violent criticism, would at any rate be received with respectful attention when coming from such a quarter, and might possibly be at once accepted as suitable and appropriate.

The regimental delegates were generally agreed that something ought to be done; but opinions differed greatly as to what it should be. Murphy, who was of the party, thought the one thing needful was to do away with the brigade system, and make the battery the unit of organisation. What could be more absurd, said he and others, than these nominal brigades, with no two of their batteries in the same place, and where you may have the colonel at Ceylon, professing to command one battery at the Cape, and another at the Mauritius? Still more absurd, they argued, is the system as exemplified in India, where you may find three or

more batteries at a station, each belonging to a different brigade, the returns of which are flying about to the different nominal brigade headquarters in all parts of the country.

That, said the advocates of the brigade system, is because you don't work it properly.

Never can be worked properly, said the other side. The brigade system assumes that you are to have nothing but one sort of artillery at each place, horse artillery here, foot artillery there, and so on, which is just what you can't have. At all large military stations each description of the arm needs to be represented — horse, field, and garrison artillery. These have now to be furnished by detachments from as many different brigades—hence divided command, and confusion, and circumlocution, and other absurdities. Besides, the plan of carrying out artillery reliefs by brigades works badly. You change the artillery at Gibraltar or Malta all at once, and it takes the new men a twelvemonth to learn their way about the fortifications. We shall find ourselves in a pretty mess if war does break out, and we lose the command of the Mediterranean.

Julian Straight, who as a representative man in one sense, being a very good specimen of the plunger element in the regiment, had been one of those called in, thought the problem would be solved by separating the horse and foot artillery (first of all, of course, posting him to the former branch), and making two distinct services of them. Cobbe Smith,

who also was present, said we ought to have four great artillery divisions, at Woolwich, Portsmouth, Plymouth, and Dublin, from which detachments should be sent out, as with the marines, to all parts of the world.

Other regimental doctors were for separating the field and garrison artillery. You want tactical skill for the one, they said—science for the other.

“The battery-unit is so convenient,” said Colonel Seeby, a great authority, “because you can pick and choose your field officers to send on service with the batteries, which go by roster.”

“The independent battery system would be altogether an anachronism,” said another officer of distinction, “involving the very incarnation of over-centralisation. It would mean that the Deputy Adjutant-General of the regiment is to be everything, and every one else nothing. It would not be more absurd to do away with separate regiments in the cavalry, and work the whole of that force by independent squadrons.”

“It is better than the brigade system we have now,” rejoined Seeby, “where the officer nominally commanding the artillery at a station has nothing to say to his batteries, because they belong to other brigades, while the brigade commanders are hundreds of miles off, and never see their batteries from one year’s end to another.”

“In my opinion,” said the Commander-in-Chief, after some further discussion, “both the present

brigade and proposed battery systems stand condemned by simply stating them. The difficulties that arise in working either plan result necessarily from attempting to deal with the artillery as one regiment. The fact is, the artillery service, with its forty thousand men, has quite outgrown management in this way. Just the same difficulty would arise if you tried to work all the infantry, or all the cavalry of the army as one regiment. The existing artillery regiment has become utterly unwieldy. And the remedy is plain. Break up the regiment into smaller ones of manageable size."

"You propose then to create three separate regiments for the horse, and field, and garrison artillery, I presume, sir?" said one of the party.

"Certainly not. Each regiment would contain a proportion of the three branches."

"But surely the qualifications needed for the mounted and garrison branches are so very different?"

"That is just why I would have the three elements contained in each of the new regiments. You can't tell at first how a youngster will turn out; but after a certain time, when his speciality declares itself, you post him accordingly."

"But I would submit that quite a different sort of talent is wanted for the mounted and foot branches. For the field artillery tactical skill is the quality most needed; for the garrison artillery scientific attainments are more necessary."

"Then the garrison artillery must be in a parlous state," said the Commander-in-Chief, tartly, "for it certainly has not got them. The smattering of mathematics picked up by a lad who comes out bottom of the list at Woolwich don't make him very scientific, I suppose. And no need that he should be. A few able theorists here and there in the regiment are all very well, of course, and there will always be plenty such out of sixteen hundred officers; but you no more want the whole regiment to be scientific, than a whole spear need be made of steel. The qualities that make a good regimental officer in the other branches of the service are, I take it, those most needed here also."

I thought His Excellency in these remarks went beyond what was necessary, but the occasion was not suitable for saying so. He continued—

"It so happens that the present establishment of the artillery force admits of subdivision very conveniently. The regiment now comprises altogether two hundred batteries of sorts. Well, my right honourable friend" [meaning me] "sanctions the formation of sixteen more, which will be got without extra expense by reduction of horses, by remitting a proportion of gunners to the reserve, and in various other ways, while there are sufficient supernumerary officers already to man them without any augmentation. We shall thus have 216 batteries altogether, which it is proposed to divide into nine regiments of twenty-four batteries each, or one regiment for each

Military Division, to which it will be permanently attached, some of its batteries being always abroad, and the rest serving with its proper Military Division at home. The reliefs to be carried out by batteries, on a separate roster for each of these new regiments.

“By this plan we get rid of all the difficulties attaching to the present system, and to either of the alternative schemes which have heretofore been put forward. For example, my gallant friend (Colonel Seeby) thinks you should have the means of choosing your field officers for active service. Well, each of the new regiments will have more than a dozen field officers, thus affording ample room for selection. Similarly as regards distribution of the officers between the mounted and foot branches, this will be an easy matter in a regiment which contains altogether a hundred and fifty officers. Then see how conveniently the plan will work in India, where it is necessary in many cases to have batteries of different kinds, horse, field, and garrison, serving together at the same station, and belonging under the existing preposterous system to as many different brigades. These will under the new plan constitute a detachment of one and the same regiment, to which, of course, the officer commanding it will also belong. All circumlocution of paper-work, and conflict between virtual and nominal commanders, is thus at once got rid of. Then as regards the objection to carrying out artillery reliefs by brigades, at Malta

and other places, which has been spoken of. This would also be entirely got rid of, because the reliefs might be effected by detachments of two or three batteries at a time, yet the homogeneity of the command still be maintained intact."

"What would be the composition of one of these new regiments?" asked Sir Prinseps Arme. "Has it been determined on yet?"

"Yes, each regiment will consist of 4 horse (or light field) batteries, 12 field (or heavy field) batteries, and 8 garrison (or foot) batteries; or 24 batteries in all.

"By making a small reduction," continued His Excellency, "in the number of batteries serving abroad, this organisation will give the required number of 60 field-guns per division, or 540 field-guns in all for home purposes, as seen by the accompanying statement," which the speaker handed round the room, and which was as follows :—

PRESENT DISTRIBUTION.

	Horse Batteries.	Field Batteries.	Garrison Batteries.	Total.
At home .	16	40	35	91
Abroad .	15	37	57	109
	<hr/> 31	<hr/> 77	<hr/> 92	<hr/> 200

NEW DISTRIBUTION.

At home .	22	72	18	112
Abroad .	14	36	54	104
	<hr/> 36	<hr/> 108	<hr/> 72	<hr/> 216

"Have you not overlooked one point, sir?" ob-

served Sir Prinseps Arme, after scrutinising the paper. "This scheme assumes that only two garrison batteries of each regiment will be serving at home, or eighteen for the whole regiment, in place of thirty-five at present. How are the home fortifications to be manned?"

"By the militia artillery, to be sure. What else are they for?"

"But in case of sudden emergency?"

"Which can now never arise—thought of invasion becomes an idle dream when once we have established a real military organisation."

"Excuse my putting forward another objection," persisted Sir Prinseps. "According to your scheme, these two garrison batteries of each regiment which are serving at home will have to furnish reliefs for six. So that the garrison artillery will have a great deal more than its fair share of foreign service."

"No, my idea is that the roster for foreign service should go through the field batteries as well. A field battery relieving a garrison battery would make over its drivers to the latter, and the two would change duties as well as places."

"Would not this be to convert efficient field into inefficient garrison artillery, and *vice versa*, and to throw away all the experience each branch has gained in its own line?"

"You speak as if every one of the men composing a battery had been serving his full ten years in it."

Remember that a large proportion of the force would always consist of young soldiers—a very large proportion, if the reserve system works well—who will have plenty of time to learn their new work. Besides, there is a great deal in the duties of the two branches common to both ; and, after all, something may well be sacrificed for the sake of having an adequate establishment of field artillery at home: the gain on the whole, I apprehend, will far outweigh the loss."

"I presume," said another of our party, "that this subdivision of the regiment applies only to the men? The officers, I suppose, will still be borne on one seniority list?"

"Certainly not. They too are to be distributed equally among the nine new regiments. A reduction of the present overgrown list into more manageable bodies is needed quite as much for the officers as the men."

"You are aware, however, that in the French and German Artilleries the officers are borne on one list for the whole service."

"So much the worse for them, I should say," retorted the Commander-in-Chief. "But they have not our Indian and Colonial duties, with batteries scattered all over the world. To work a list of sixteen hundred officers under these conditions is simply intolerable. In fact, the only question to my mind is whether these new regiments, with a hundred and

fifty officers each, will not be too large rather than too small."

"Then do you mean, sir," broke in Julian Straight, "that promotion should run separately in these regiments, to the exclusion of seniority claims as shown in the general list?"

"Certainly."

"Then a man might be superseded by a fellow who is now his junior."

"So he can be at present in the infantry and cavalry."

"Ah! but that is different."

"Quite so; we want to abolish the difference. Besides, even now a captain in the regiment may have his junior a field officer, and so senior to him."

"Yes, but that is only brevet rank."

"Brevet rank or regimental rank, the one will practically cause no greater supersession than the other."

"But surely, sir, it would never do to have a man going over your head who passed out of Woolwich below you."

"What virtue does a man acquire by going to Woolwich, that he is to be for ever after secured from supersession? Besides, after all he is not really secure at present. I suppose you will admit that the colonel-commandantships are the greatest prizes in the regiments."

"Certainly," replied Straight, "and I never expect

to get one myself, but then there never was such luck as mine."

"Well, the succession to these prizes is determined, as you know, by seniority of commission as general officers, and that again depends on the *army* seniority of the colonels, which again often depends on brevet rank bestowed as lieutenant-colonel. So you see you are already liable to supersession in your own regiment, and in the highest grades too, by your regimental juniors. The large extent to which this goes on any one may see by looking at the Army List; and I must say," added the Commander-in-Chief, "I have often thought this particular form of supersession very hard. But in face of these facts, to object to our plan, which therefore involves no new principle, and at any rate lets you all start with an even chance, seems to me like straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel."

"Well, sir," said Straight, turning towards the speaker, and no longer twirling his mustache, but smiling deferentially, and sitting as much on the edge of his chair as was compatible with a tendency to be corpulent, "I daresay the new plan may be a good one in many ways, but I must say I think it would be a great pity to break up the old regiment."

The general sense of the meeting, however, was in favour of the scheme, which was shortly afterwards embodied in a royal warrant.

In publishing this, the opportunity was taken to

embody some modifications of the original plan. It was generally admitted that in these days of big armaments, the existing battery of six guns was not a sufficiently large tactical unit. The new organisation, therefore, gave a battery of *twelve* guns as the tactical unit, each battery—twelve of which made up one of the new regiments—being commanded by a lieutenant-colonel, and divided into three troops or companies of four guns each. This organisation also rendered it practicable to make a reduction of subalterns—a measure very necessary to prevent stagnation of promotion ; while the opportunity was taken to readjust the proportion of majors and captains in this branch of the service, the excessive number of the majors allowed to the Artillery having been felt as a grievance by the rest of the army. The establishment of a battery was therefore fixed at one lieutenant-colonel, one major, three captains (one being adjutant), and four lieutenants.

The command of each of the nine artillery regiments thus constituted was made that of a Brigade-General ; while to insure uniformity throughout the different regiments, four Inspectors were appointed with rank of Major-Generals, and an Inspector-General for the whole service with rank of general. The appointment of Chief of Artillery Staff (late Deputy-Adjutant-General) became a qualification under the new system for promotion to Brigade-General and that of Director-General of Magazines

for Major-General. Thus the establishment of Artillery generals on the active list was fixed at 1 General, 5 Major-Generals, and 10 Brigade-Generals, in addition to any who after the completion of their five years' tour of appointment might be unemployed, all these grades being filled up by selection, without reference to seniority. Further, general officers of Artillery and Engineers were declared to be eligible for ordinary military commands; and that the principle might be distinctly recognised at once, at home as well as in India, a major-general of Artillery was appointed to one of the new Military Divisions.

It was provided that all generals of Artillery, after being unemployed for five years, should be transferred to a retired list, as in the other branches of the army.

CHAPTER LXVII.

DEALS WITH THE SISTER SERVICE.

A FEW days after the Artillery *séance* recorded in the last chapter, Strickland showed me a letter he had received from my old acquaintance Peake of the Engineers, the same who had appeared so much aggrieved at my entry into Parliament two years before, and the measure of success gained there. I thought at first the letter might be a protest against my venturing to undertake the duties of a Secretary of State, but found that it was conceived in a somewhat different strain.

"I venture upon our slight acquaintance," said the writer, "to intrude these few remarks, in the hope that they may be thought not undeserving of being brought under the notice of the Secretary of State. Although fully aware of the heavy demands on his valuable time, and of the intimate acquaintance he possesses with all military details, still I respectfully hope that the following suggestions, made in the public interests by one who, although occupying a com-

paratively humble position, has yet exercised careful observation for many years, may be deemed not undeserving of consideration.

"I understand," he went on to say, "that Mr Secretary West is about to reorganise entirely the Artillery regiment, and I would venture to suggest that the sister service would benefit equally by similar treatment. In our case, perhaps, there is not the same necessity for a division of the regiment into a number of smaller ones, as in the Artillery, because most of the officers of Engineers are detached from the companies of engineer soldiers and employed on independent duties ; but a corps of over eight hundred officers rising in one seniority list is, I submit, clearly a cumbrous organisation. The uniformity in promotion induced by dealing with so large a body as one unit, places the corps at great disadvantage with the rest of the army, since anything like rapid promotion or a run of luck becomes impossible ; while under a system of unadulterated seniority, notoriously incompetent officers get their promotion equally with the more efficient.

"I would therefore venture to suggest that the corps of Royal Engineers be subdivided like the Artillery into a number of smaller regiments, with the same proportion of officers as at present. Promotion in these to be made by selection, either within the regiment, or from one regiment to another.

“The companies of Sappers should also be re-organised. The fact is,” continued our correspondent, “the whole thing wants overhauling, if I may venture to use such an expression in addressing you. Our people want to turn Chatham into a sort of military Little Pedlington, where they may grub away by themselves, losing sight of what is doing by the rest of the army and the rest of the world. The great object seems to be to get the whole regiment collected there under training. In fact, the corps will soon get to be so highly trained that it would be quite unfit for any other kind of employment. They have got over a hundred subalterns now under instruction, and the course of preparation seems ever growing longer, till eventually a subaltern will not get through it till just about when his turn comes for promotion to captain. But all this teaching seems, in my humble opinion, to come at the wrong place. Young men don’t see the good of this perpetual schooling, but want to be up and about, entering on the practical business of life. Afterwards, later on in their service, when it would be really useful to brush up their technical knowledge, they never get a chance. Most of the corps never go to the Chatham school of instruction again, but pass their lives pottering about in the colonies or at home stations, tinkering barracks—razors cutting grindstones, in fact.”

I observed to my private secretary, when he had

finished reading Major Peak's letter, that I did not approve of its flippant style, more especially as I had always been given to understand that the engineering school at Chatham was quite a model establishment of its kind. Nevertheless, there seemed to be a good deal of reason in his views generally (I knew Peake to be a clever fellow, although not a very agreeable one), for they appeared on inquiry to find general approval with the officers of the distinguished corps in question ; and it was accordingly determined to reorganise 'the corps of Royal Engineers as nine separate regiments or cadres of officers, five to be employed principally in India, and four at home and in the colonies.

A certain number of the higher regimental appointments were constituted general officers' commands, appointments to which carried promotion to that rank, as in the other branches of the army.

The forty companies of Sappers were also formed into nine separate battalions of four or five companies each, one battalion having its headquarters attached to each of the new Military Divisions and furnishing one or two companies for foreign service, and an occasional company in roster for instruction at Chatham.

The Engineer Train was also broken up as a separate branch of the corps, and a detachment, with an engineer equipment, was posted to each battalion, on a plan which would admit of rapid expansion in time

of war : the object kept always in view in all these reorganisations being to render each Military Division a complete army in itself.

The opportunity of these changes was taken to reduce a part of the majors of the Engineer corps prospectively, the number of captains being correspondingly increased, so as to bring the proportion of grades more into accord with that obtaining in other branches of the service. And the strength of subalterns also was prospectively reduced, it being represented that the long list of officers in this grade was a principal cause of the slow promotion obtaining in this eminent body.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

A PARTING.

TIME passed on, and as each day showed England better prepared for the threatening struggle, the outbreak of violence which she had flown to arms to resist seemed to become each day less imminent. The spectacle of a nation, peace-loving, yet unanimously arming for war, not in a spirit of aggression or hope of gain, but to resist outrage on the laws of nations, and violation of the rights of neutrals—this spectacle, enhanced by the display of her abounding resources which the effort called forth, as England regretfully but steadfastly prepared herself for the sacrifice, had already produced a great effect. The peace-disturbing powers seemed gradually to be awakening to the conviction that a new element had been introduced into their calculations; that the peace of Europe could not always be disturbed, nor unoffending neutrals be trampled on with impunity; and that might and right would perchance for once be found together on the same side. Although,

therefore, the storm-cloud still hung dark over the political horizon, eyes practised in political meteorology could already discern a coming light. There was room for hope that a recurrence of the mistake made on a former memorable occasion might be prevented, and war averted by being ready for war.

But to secure this happy end it needed to strain every effort in the race of preparation. The work of years had to be concentrated into a few weeks, and for those who had the guidance of affairs, labour unremitting was the only occupation. Such a time as this it is not given to men often to live, and it needed the excitement of such a time to carry a man through it. But work joined with excitement and success, as I have before remarked, does not kill; it is unsuccessful work and disappointment which break a man down. And as each day brought us nearer to the accomplishment of our plans, and the apparent turmoil and confusion which attended the first plunge into instantaneous reorganisation were found to be quickly succeeded by the order evolved, while the nation gratefully recognised the efforts making in her cause; under such circumstances the Government, and the War Minister perhaps more than any one, could feel in its best and most gratifying form the happiness of power.

Still, the work was certainly fatiguing, and I think we were all of us glad of the occasional relaxations—the only thing of the sort we could allow ourselves—

afforded by sittings at the House. For there is no writing to be done on such occasions ; one had not very often to talk ; and was never required to listen. Many a refreshing nap then did I enjoy on the Treasury bench, sufficient to carry me through the night afterwards ; and I suspect that most of us went down to the House with this object, and stopped there more than was absolutely necessary, for indeed there is something exquisitely soothing in the droning of casual debate.

At any rate, I confess that this was the motive which took me down to the House on one memorable evening. There had been a small Ministerial dinner-party at Ulster House to discuss various matters, including the Army Mobilisation Bill, which I was to bring in for a first reading that night. The discussion came off before the meal, during which I could hardly keep awake, for I had been up the whole night before, and I slipped away on the move being made from the dining-room up-stairs. I knew that my Bill could not come on till very late ; but I was possessed by an uncontrollable longing for a brief slumber on the Treasury bench. I thought if I could only get a place next Mr Braham, who having business in charge had quitted the party half an hour before me, he would be sure not to talk, and by putting my hat on the other side, I might perhaps secure a few minutes of undisturbed repose ; and I fell asleep in the carriage thinking over this delicious prospect, to awake in the Palace Yard.

Things turned out just as I had expected. The Attorney-General was speaking on the second reading of the High Appellate Court Bill ; for notwithstanding the European crisis, law reform was by no means suffered to stand still under a Great United Administration—Europe should be duly impressed by the spectacle of a great nation calmly pursuing the course of domestic reform amid the din of preparation for battle ; and soothed by the mellifluous accents of Sir Dulcet Bland, my neighbour and I were sleeping the sleep of the just who have dined well, when I was awakened by a card being put into my hand. It was that of Mr Harry Perkins, who had come to claim his promise of admission to a debate, and whom I found, blushing and nervous, in the lobby.

“ I hope you’ll pardon the liberty, sir, but as you were so kind about it, and we haven’t got any lecture to-night, at Mathews’s—it’s De Plomer’s turn, our lecturer in Stethoscopic Diagnosis—he is said to be the greatest authority in Europe, is De Plomer ; but they’re all wonderfully clever, our lecturers are, and so uncommon scientific too,—so I thought, sir, seeing in the papers that you were going to make a great speech to-night, I thought I would take the liberty of sending in my card.” Thus Mr Perkins, as I led him into the House, assuring him of the pleasure it was to be of service to him—for you need not feel cross at being woke up if you only get a clear half-hour for your nap—and seated him under the gallery.

My young friend thoroughly enjoyed this, his first visit ; and when later in the evening I came up again to where he sat, he was full of interest in the scene.

“And so that is the Attorney-General, sir, is it really ? A beautiful speaker he is, I am sure, and so ready with his words, and quite argumentative, if one may say so. He reminds me of Bowluss, our Lecturer on *Medica Præscripta* at Mathews’s, only Bowluss has a louder voice.”

“Well, Mr Harry, and how are you getting on with your work ? You seem thoroughly interested in it at any rate, which is a great point. I suppose you have plenty to do between all these great lecturers.”

“Yes, indeed, sir. You see, sir, there is so much scientific work to be got through in our profession ; and then there is the anatomy, and then there is the bones to be got up ; they are a puzzle, and no mistake. Why, the examiners will throw down a heap of hand-bones on the table, and tell you to pick out a third metacarpal, and pluck you right off if you take the wrong one. There was one of our men last year, a tremendous clever fellow, and a dead hand at demonstrations, got plucked in this way. He got flurried, you know, and couldn’t tell one bone from another, or an anterior surface from a posterior, up at the table before the examiners, although he had been carrying about a set of bones in his pocket for weeks, and just before he went into the room he could say off all the processes by heart

Nerves touched up by over-work, it was said to be."

"I hope too much work won't destroy your nerves, Mr Harry; but you appear to have plenty to do, which is a good thing in London."

"Yes, sir; and then you see I am attending St Fecunda's Lying-in-Hospital besides. It won't be much good to me, I fancy, out in Bengal, for I'm told the Hindoos don't care about gentlemen accoucheurs; but the governor, that's Mr Fergusson, thought I had better go through a course there. I've just come from the hospital now. We look in there at odd times, you know, sir, for that's a class of case that doesn't come regular."

"And by the way, sir," continued the young man presently, "if you will excuse the liberty, had you not a servant-girl called Poole, a niece, or something of the sort, of Miss Barton's two maids down at Leatherby?"

"What about her?" I asked hurriedly, remembering what I had almost forgotten, that this was the surname of our unfortunate Annette.

"Well, sir, she's now in this very hospital."

Seeing that I looked eager for more news, Harry Perkins went on—

"Yes, sir, I only saw her yesterday for the first time, although she has been there for some weeks, but you see it's not one of my cases. Poor thing, she's dreadfully changed! She was a very nice—

looking young woman, you know, sir ; many's the time she's opened the door for me at Miss Barton's, when she has been stopping there, but now you would hardly know her, she's wasted so. But I was certain it was her, and she evidently knew me, though she wouldn't speak. Poor thing ! her husband—she goes under the name of Gates now—ran away from her, it appears, off to America, and she went into the hospital and her child was born about six weeks ago ; but the child died, and she won't be long in following it, poor thing ! I went up and asked her if she recollected Leatherby, but she only shook her head, and wouldn't speak."

Poor Annette ! her fate had almost passed out of recollection, making way for the larger cares of later months ; but as I sat by listening, sick at heart, the humble tragedy of which this poor girl was the subject came up in all its phases before my mind. Her modest, gentle ways at first, her shyness and timidity when she first came to live with us in London ; the warning of change which passed unheeded ; this same girl so soon to be taking a part in the coarse debauch of which I had been witness ; then her flight and miserable marriage, to save her from deeper disgrace ; as I thought of all this, the result—so conscience whispered, blaming myself and Eva—of selfish indifference and selfish preoccupation, the House of Commons disappeared from my blurred eyes, and I almost fancied myself reacting the scene

in the little room, with Eva, the detective, and the poor girl, when we had tried in vain to persuade her to return to us.

At last, after a pause, during which I found a difficulty in speaking, I managed to ask if we could see her then. Certainly, Mr Perkins said, he could go in and out of the hospital at any hour ; he should be very proud to have the honour of showing me over it.

It was now close on eleven o'clock, and my motion might properly be deferred—besides, I felt now incapable of doing justice to it.

“I will speak a word to Glissereene, the Treasury whip,” I said, “and be back directly, and then we will take a cab to the hospital.”

The hospital, although clean and airy, seemed to be pervaded by a close and stuffy feeling peculiar to buildings of the kind. Lights were burning in the corridors, and although it was not far from midnight, there was a sense of movement in the place as of vigils kept within. “This way, sir, please,” said my guide ; “the case is in the convalescent ward, although, poor thing, there's not much convalescence about her, I am afraid.” So saying, Mr Perkins opened a door from the corridor, and led the way into a large room with beds ranged down each side, leaving a wide passage in the middle. The dim light burning showed many of the inmates to be awake ;

and I thought, as we passed down towards a bed at the end of the room, that the faces of some expressed a sort of pleased curiosity, as if any excitement were welcome which interrupted the monotony of their life there.

"Look up, my dear, there's somebody come to see you," said the nurse, placing her hand lightly on the patient's shoulder.

The sick woman opened her eyes, and looked dreamily at the nurse, then turning her head the other way wearily closed them again. As the shaded light fell on her face while she turned, I could just recognise in the pale wasted features and sunken cheeks, the once blooming face of Eva's little maid.

"She lies mostly so," said the nurse to us in a low voice; "she understands what is said to her, and takes her food regular, but she hasn't said nothing these last three days. She won't last long; she's much weaker to-day."

"I don't like to disturb her," I said, "and yet I should very much wish to see if she can recognise me."

The nurse again roused her patient gently, and again the latter seemed to be awake.

"Annette," I said.

At sound of the name the hollow eyes turned dreamily towards me.

"Annette," I said, "do you not know me?" A

faint flush of recognition passed over the wan face, which then turned over on one side, the eyes still open, but averted, a slow laboured breathing the only motion.

"Annette," I said, stooping down so as to bring my face in the direction of her glance; "Annette, my poor girl, I have only just heard of your being here—I am going home now to tell Eva of it; she will come and be with you in the morning. She will be so glad to have found you at last."

As I spoke, I took her hand which lay outside the coverlet. The slender fingers returned the pressure feebly, and before I knew her purpose, she had drawn my hand to her lips and kissed it. Then the fingers relaxed their grasp, and the eyes closed again.

"There, you see she notices you," said the nurse; "She's quite sensible most times, but she can't often speak."

It seemed useless to stay any longer, so watching silently for a short space the laboured breathing, I retired with the others down the ward.

"A clear case of Tubercula," said Mr Perkins, as he opened the door and led the way into the passage; "symptoms very marked in their later stages."

"She's sinking slowly," said the nurse, "but she may last some days yet. She takes her food so regular, you see, sir, every two hours, and that keeps her up a bit."

I parted at the door of the hospital with Harry Perkins, who promised to meet Eva next morning and arrange for her admission, and pursued my way homewards on foot. It would be too late for Eva to see her dying servant that night, but I felt sure that she would wish to hurry to the hospital the first thing in the morning ; and I thought, not without a certain sense of melancholy satisfaction, that any duty reclaiming her for the moment from the pursuit of fashionable frivolity which now made up her life might not be without its use.

Musing thus, and sad at heart, the scene I had just witnessed brought up the uneasy consciousness which in leisure moments sometimes now made itself felt, that the life of Eva and myself also had in one sense been not without its tragic *dénouement*. The state we had come to, of two persons living together, and yet leading two separate lives, was truly as much removed from the sad tragedy enacted in the person of this poor girl, as the sin she was now expiating exceeded in its coarse simplicity the deviations from duty, which, if slight in themselves, had yet, conjoined with my vanity and selfish preoccupation, sufficed to make shipwreck of our domestic happiness. Still, however great the difference, both were cases alike of going astray from the path of duty ; and I could not but feel, as I have said, a certain inward satisfaction in thinking how this discovery of her humble friend might recall Eva to her better

self; and, if truth be told, how I might now find opportunity without sacrifice of pride to open my heart once more to my wife. And, thinking thus, a vision as of a refund happiness passed before my mind.

CHAPTER LXIX.

A DISCOVERY.

BUT the current of reflection was interrupted by a block in the road. My way lay through one of the principal thoroughfares of London; and the crowd of carriages, entering and departing from the courtyard of a great mansion which lay back from the roadway, and extending far down the street, announced that the noble owner was giving a great entertainment that evening. I then recollected dimly that Eva had said something about going to the Duchess of Scarborough's ball. She would therefore probably be found within, and I turned into the court and entered the house. Although hardly in ball trim, I was in evening dress, and Cabinet Ministers are not expected to be particular about these trifles. I would find Eva and take her home at once. The notion that she should be dancing while Annette was dying would shock her as much as it did me; and, given up though she was to the pursuit of pleasure, she would yet certainly wish to break off to-night

when she learnt my news. Thus thinking, I made my way up the great staircase, wondering whether I was really among the guests invited, but reflecting that in any case the presence of a Secretary of State would probably not be resented as an intrusion.


Passing through one or two antechambers, occupied with groups of people whom I did not recognise, I came to the ball-room, which, spacious as it was, was yet crowded after London fashion; lookers-on pressed in on the dancers on all sides, and groups of people were standing in all the doorways. Pulled up thus at the entrance, I looked round among the shifting faces as each couple of waltzers passed across my field of view, seeking for Eva amongst them, when my ear was caught by something in the conversation of two young men standing immediately in front of me, whom I guessed from previous remarks to be Guardsmen—conversation which, although carried on in a low undertone, I was yet close enough in the pressure of the crowd to hear distinctly.

“Tommy is going the pace again.”

“Yes, he is, and no mistake, the naughty beggar; old enough too to know better.”

“The attraction must be admitted, at any rate.”

“Well, I don’t admire the thread-paper style of beauty for my part,” drawled the second of the young puppies; “still the attraction may be admitted, and the temptation. For all her shy looks, madame seems not very *difficile*.”



"Ah, still water runs deep ; but I'll tell you what, unless *Monsieur le Mari* looks out, there will be a case for Sir Cresswell—at least, I mean for the chap in his place—before long, and no mistake about it."

"It's too bad, though, to take advantage of his opportunities in this way. Master Tommy ought to be ashamed of himself."

"Oh, confound it, man ! you can't expect a fellow to be too particular if he meets with encouragement of this sort."

"Ah," rejoined the other, "I believe you would be as bad as he if you had the chance, you young scamp."

Just then the speaker turned his face, and seeing mine within a few inches of him, gave a start and a low involuntary whistle of surprise ; "Whew ! *Monsieur le Mari !*" he said to his companion in a whisper, and then pushed his way on with the other through the crowd.

It did not want this last sentence to know the purport of the conversation. Almost from the first word I understood how deeply it concerned me, and I felt the blood rush to my face as I stood rooted to the spot, hearing distinctly every word of this horrid gossip, and gazing after it ceased rigidly before me into the maze of dancers. And at that moment I saw the object of my search : Eva, waltzing with Strickland, passed round that corner of the room of

which I commanded a view. They disappeared again in a few seconds among the crowd, but the time seemed more than enough to confirm my dreadful suspicions. Passion, bold and triumphant, was written in his face, as he bore her round in his arms; her eyes were bent downwards, but for a moment she raised them, and meeting his glance, there seemed in her gentle and as I thought coquettish smile, a glance of perfect understanding.

I stood thus entranced for a few seconds after this revelation, and then turning left the house, feeling as if the shame would be less if I were not there to witness it.

A minute afterwards, and my impulse was to go back and confront the guilty pair. But I shrank from the scandal such a scene might create. Anything like an affray between a Minister and his private secretary, especially about such a subject, would only be procured at the cost of further publicity and bitter humiliation.


Then I thought I would return and watch them without making myself known. But this might not be possible; and, besides, to look on at a repetition of the scene I had already witnessed, perhaps to hear more coarse jokes at my expense, would be intolerable.

In this state of indecision, a prey to mortification and passion, I reached home, and letting myself in, spent the rest of the night pacing the drawing-room

in a fever of restless impatience, running over in the bitterness of my heart the events which had culminated in this horrid end. Everything was clear now. The first attentions of the Strickland family, which, fool that I was, I set down to a recognition of our social merit, were now seen plainly to be the first link in the carefully-wrought chain of deliberate villainy. Then the pursuit carried on under guise of courtship of the unmarried sister, till finally the wily destroyer had established himself in the very house, employing the whole of his family as unconscious agents to complete the deception. Fool that I was, not to see through this transparent artifice; to suppose that a worn-out *roué* would thus be transformed into a plodding man of business; and while I had been flattering myself with the belief that this enlistment in my service was a testimony to my own superior powers, all the town was laughing at the facile cuckold. Even a young girl like Mary Drew had seen enough to make her give the warning which I had been too blind to understand. Then, too, I remembered how this man had been witness to the daily progress of estrangement between Eva and myself, fanning, no doubt, her growing discontent at my neglect; the ready confidant, probably, of her grievances, real and supposed. There could be no mistake about it. That scene in the library with the caricature especially came up to recollection; and other incidents, trifles at the time, now crowded up in the mind to

form an overwhelming chain of circumstantial evidence. And all this ruin might have been so easily averted. A little gentleness and sympathy, and I might have retained for ever my poor wife's affection, once so entirely mine, now lost for ever; and yet, what sort of a heart could that be, so easily, so soon, estranged? And then I recollected with bitterness how little real emotion she had shown when leaving her home, and again at parting with her sister; the little care she had taken to maintain her family ties; how little real sympathy she had ever shown for her husband and his cares and life. No, it was all too plain now; and doubtless I had not been the first man to mistake a gentle manner and pliant disposition for a warm heart. There could be no real depth of feeling in Eva, so easily won, and so easily lost.

Such were the bitter reflections that followed each other through my mind. Then came up a doubt. After all, what am I judging by? Am I to condemn her unheard, merely because of a momentary glimpse in the confusion of a crowded ball-room? What have I seen but that to raise even a suspicion? But then succeeded another horrid doubt. I, of course, should be the last person to see anything. Besides, this was not the only ground of suspicion. There was the conversation of those boys with their ribald jests. If two lads like these, on the threshold of society, were aware of the scandal, it must be the talk of the town.



But then, again, conscience whispered that the loose slander of two boys should have but little weight. If coarse talk like that were to count for anything, no reputation would be safe; the brutal licence of youthful tongues is only bounded by their folly. And though angry condemnation came uppermost, my heart told me, even in the depth of my bitterness, that I must hold Eva guiltless of more than folly so far; weak and foolish she might be—but actually faithless, no that was impossible. At most she was on the verge of temptation, dallying with danger; but estranged though we were, I felt sure at least that she was not guilty of such a depth of treachery. And my heart turned to pity and bitter self-condemnation as I thought of the danger I had allowed her to be exposed to. So young and so guileless, what folly of me in my selfish preoccupation to leave her to tread alone the slippery path of fashionable life!

But it might not be too late to retrace the false course we had entered on. First withdraw her from the danger which beset her, and then let me try to regain the love I had discarded by neglect. And this must all be done without giving a sign to any one save herself of my suspicion. I must not, at any rate, by any action give the world reason to confirm its judgment; in appearance, at least, I must hold her above the defilement of suspicion. Nor must I condescend to bandy words with the villain who had been plotting this mischief.

Then I thought of our friend Fergusson's caution about Eva's health, and suggestion to move her to a milder climate. Ah! if this had been acted on long ago. But no time should now be lost in employing the convenient excuse for removing her from the scene of danger. It might be arranged that she should live for a time in peaceful retreat under her aunt's quiet roof, or perhaps with her friend at Thorpe. No better guardian than Mary in such case.

Musing thus, and pacing the room restlessly, the hours passed by, and the grey light of morning was dimming the lustre of the lights within, when a carriage stopped at the door, and the vague dread passed away which ever and anon had come uppermost, that perhaps after all I might be too late to ward off the danger, and that this night she was not to return.

I stepped out to the landing-place to meet her, when I was arrested by the sound of a man's voice in the hall. It was Strickland's. I could not hear what was said, but it was enough to know that he had returned with her. All my worst fears, and with them my bitterness of heart returned; I would at least before anything tax her with what I knew, and hear what she could say in defence. I moved back into the drawing-room.

Presently the hall door was closed again, and then I heard a light footstep—light, but as of one tired—coming up the stairs.

Then Eva entered the room. On seeing me she stopped.

She looked differently now from what she had done in the ball-room; the flush of excitement had passed away, leaving her very pale, and the eyes looked dark and hollow. And yet as she stood there, the mantle which had fallen from her shoulders hanging in folds around her, the hands crossed, the fan and bouquet pendent from the slender fingers, I thought she had never looked more beautiful. Unconsciously she had assumed the very attitude expressed in the picture which now looked down on us.

"Oh, Charlie!" she exclaimed, "you quite startled me. Fancy your being still up."

She was moving forward again, when the expression of my face arrested her, and she stopped again, looking anxiously at me, the lips half open, as if making mute question. Was this merely surprise, I thought, or guilty conscience?

I passed round to the door without speaking, keeping at a distance from her, and closed it, Eva following me with her eyes; and then, again avoiding her, returned to the centre of the room.

"Yes, madam," I said, "we have both had abundant occupation for the night; and vastly agreeable it has been for both."

"What *do* you mean, Charlie?" she cried, still standing at some distance.

"You are fond of balls and dancing. This one has been as pleasant as the rest of them, I hope? Nay, perhaps even more so, I daresay?"

"I don't know why you should be so bitter about my going to balls," retorted Eva, reproachfully. "I suppose if I were to say I didn't really care about them, you would discover something to find fault about, even then?" And she moved wearily towards a chair, as if going to sit down.

"I should, indeed," I replied, passionately; "because you would then say what you know is not true."

Eva turned round towards me, exclaiming indignantly, "How dare you speak like that to me?"

"Dare!" I cried. "Is it you only who are to dare to do anything? I am to keep silence, forsooth, or pick and choose mealy-mouthed phrases to save hurting your precious feelings, while you are outraging all decency by your behaviour? Eva! Eva! frail I know you to be, but I did not think you would dare to brazen out your shame like this."

"Charles," she pleaded, in a voice tremulous with emotion, holding out her arms, as if to implore forbearance—"Charles, please stop; I won't hear you, if you speak to me like this."

"But you shall hear me!" I broke in. "You brazen it out now, but perhaps you will take a different line when I tell you that I know everything, although till this night it appears I was about

the only man in London ignorant of your disgraceful misconduct."

"Charles!" gasped Eva, imploringly, again holding up her arms, her face half turned away; "Charles, for God's sake, stop!"

"Yes," I hurried on; "you profess to take a high line; but when I tell you that I too was at the ball and saw your wanton conduct, and heard the coarse jests made at my expense about you, then I ask you how do you dare to come back, even to my very house, with your paramour, and then to come in here with a lie on your lips?"

Eva gazed with pallid, horror-stricken face for a moment towards mine, and then turning round, hurried from the room.

CHAPTER LXX.

A DAY OF DESPAIR.

LEFT alone, I became instantly sensible of the folly of my conduct. In place of the grave remonstrance, which might have brought Eva to my feet, I had frightened her by my violence, enough almost to justify impenitence—even defiance. This was the result of all my long deliberations, of the plans I had proposed to myself for winning back my wife. This was the sober guardian who would reclaim her by wise kindnesses from the path of danger ; acting instead the noisy ranter ! Eva had parted from me without one word of explanation or contrition, which, after my violence, would now perhaps, and justly, be withheld. Then my heart turned to pity as I thought of the poor girl—so young, so fair, so fragile, so delicately brought up—separated from her family, without a single friend to guide her, neglected by her husband, who now, when he should assume the neglected duty of a protector, has no better remedy to furnish for the poor child's folly than brutal coarseness of speech. Truly, as I thought over this, haunted the while by

her last wan reproachful look, I felt that mine had been but a cowardly part.

Then rose up, too, the doubts whether my horrible suspicions might not have been formed too hastily. That last appealing look was surely not of a kind to be worn with conscious guilt? But no! nothing could explain away the facts which I had witnessed. At any rate the explanation must be offered by herself. I could not follow her. Until some sign of contrition was shown, there could be no meeting again as man and wife.

Thus resolving—if such a name could be given to the storm of angry notions that chased themselves through my mind—I sought my library, and tried to address myself to business upon the papers which covered the table. But the attempt to concentrate my thoughts on work of any sort proved futile; and after an hour or more passed in a vain effort to grow calm, the full sunshine of a fine spring morning which came in at the window, suggested the experiment of trying to walk down my excitement. This seemed the best thing to do. I would then breakfast at some club, and perhaps, when I returned, Eva would be up and would seek me out; or a meeting might come about in some way without my seeming to court it. So being still in evening dress, I went up-stairs to change it before setting off.

Entering my dressing-room I found the door leading to Eva's chamber wide open, and a sense of stillness warned me before I stepped into it that the

room was empty. Eva was not there. Her ball-dress and scarf lay on the couch, her gloves and fan and jewels were on the toilet-table, her little white shoes, with the glistening buckles, were on the floor. Otherwise the room showed no signs of occupancy.

I hastened to the lower rooms to seek her through the silent dark house, for no one was yet astir, but the sight of the unlocked hall door stopped my search. There was no room for doubt now—Eva had flown. Whether planned beforehand or the effect of my harshness, the flight was certain. The cause might never be ascertained; no note or writing could I find; but there could be no room for doubt whither she had gone for help.

Stunning though the blow was, the certainty was hardly more agonising than the first discovery of the night before, and a sort of limit seemed to be reached to the workings of emotion. At any rate I found myself now most occupied in the thought what next to do. A first impulse to call in the aid of Boucher the detective was quickly dismissed. The man's matter-of-fact speculations about the behaviour of Eva's poor little servant had been sufficiently repulsive; to discuss Eva's own conduct with him would be intolerable. No, I must wait till tidings came of the fugitives, as come it would soon enough.

Then followed the question, how to live through the day? To stay at home to answer the servants' inquiries, perhaps to receive visitors on business,

would be impossible. Equally impossible to pass the long hours at the office, where the news would be sure to arrive, and everybody down to the messenger would be discussing eagerly how their chief had been outraged by his confidential *aide*.

At last a plan presented itself. Hearing somebody stirring in the house, I rang and ordered breakfast, and shut myself in my room till it was announced. That meal I had always been accustomed to take alone for many months; but as I now sat down to it a new sense of desolation seemed to fill the room, confirmed by the silence of the servants, who must know by this time of their mistress's flight, and of course understood the cause. It was impossible to swallow food; and after a show of eating I sent for a cab, and driving to the station took the train to Epsom to visit the new defences preparing on the heights. The news of my shame would not have travelled to the suburbs yet, at any rate. For one day more at least I could look other men in the face.

And this day was got through somehow. The engineers passed me on from one to another, gratified at the visit of the War Minister, who tried to simulate an interest in the busy work which his zealous subordinates were so actively engaged upon. Field-works, magazines, intrenchments, everywhere rising; soldiers and navvies, militia and linesmen, all hard at work; and from one gang to another we passed on, from Epsom to Weybridge, and from Chertsey to

Maidenhead, on horseback, or in gigs, or cabs, the weary round was made, till at evening I found myself on Bushey Heath—scene of some of Eva's and my happiest days—and taking the train for Euston, reached home by dark.

An unreasoning expectation, hoping against hope, that some news might be awaiting me at home, was dissipated by the grave silence of the servant who opened the door. I felt that a sort of mutual understanding was thus set up; and hardly daring to look the man in the face, with difficulty summoned up self-possession to ask if any one had called.

The man handed me several cards from the hall-table. They appeared to be all of Eva's visiting acquaintances; and I wondered in what terms he reported his mistress's absence, but did not ask. My own letters, he said, were on the library-table. Two messengers had come from the office with despatches, and "the Colonel," he added, had been here in the afternoon.

This was the name by which Strickland was always known in our household. I glanced at the horse-whip which hung against the wall, and thought regretfully that it was as well I was absent when he came, for this form of revenge was denied me. Yet even from him I hardly looked for such effrontery as this.

The Colonel left word, the man continued, that he would be found at the office, if I wanted him.

So they had not left London after all. Did this

mean that he expected me to demand satisfaction? He must surely know that the thing was impossible nowadays, most of all for a Cabinet Minister. And yet if ever there was a case to justify a revenge of this sort, surely it was this.

"There was a young gentleman called also, sir," continued the servant, "who seemed very anxious to see you, of the name of Perkins. I was to be particular to tell you that the young person at the hospital died this morning at twelve o'clock."

So, then, this chapter of our home tragedy had come to an end. And thinking over the scene of my last visit to the unfortunate Annette, which till now I had utterly forgotten in my own trouble, I could not but reflect also on the sad likeness in the two stories—mistress and maid, of both the fate had been the same.

The letters in the library gave no tidings. There were, as usual, among the miscellaneous collection some marked confidential; but one was from Mr Merrifield on business; another, signed "Discoverer," offered on due consideration to divulge an infallible recipe for blowing any hostile army to pieces without the use of guns; a third was from an army economist requesting perusal of an article in a popular magazine, which he had taken the liberty to forward. Not a line bearing on the matter at heart.

But even one day's absence had largely increased the accumulation of business—business that would

not wait; and after a hurried meal, I sat down to try and set steadfastly to work at clearing it off. This at least would kill time.

But the excitement of the last few hours was now wearing off, giving place to the fatigue of the day, following a night without sleep or rest. Do what I might to keep awake, I found myself nodding every minute over my work, trying in vain to understand what I was reading; and not without a feeling of shame that a need for rest should be uppermost under such circumstances, I moved to an easy-chair thinking to take a short sleep and then set to work again. But the sleep lasted longer than I intended, and I awoke to feel the chill of the fireless room, and broad daylight streaming in above the shutters.

It seemed at first as if my last parting with Eva had only just taken place, and it was some time before I realised that a second day had come since that fatal hour.

I passed into the drawing-room. Opening the window the light streamed in upon her picture, the face looking down wistfully upon me, and as it now seemed with an aspect of sadness and reproach.

Another bright day; the birds singing gaily in the gardens, and an occasional milk-cart making its early rounds, alone broke the silence of the early morning. Another long day of misery to be lived through. Let me go out, I thought, and walk down this aching restlessness.

Thus determining, I was turning away from the window, when a cab came slowly rumbling down the gardens, and in my listless mood I stopped to watch it pass by. Some traveller from the country by the night train, for there is luggage on the roof. Is it business or pleasure, I wondered dreamily, that brings visitors to London at such an hour?

The cab is keeping to our side of the road, and the driver, plying his whip in mechanical fashion on the poor jade's back with one hand, while chucking at the reins with the other, looks up at the numbers of the houses as he passes, and pulls up at my door.

A gloved hand lets down the window, and a woman's face looks out—a young girl's face; it is Mary Drew!

I hurried down-stairs, and, opening the hall-door, ran down the steps. Mary stood on the pavement, and by her Aunt Emily, the two helping out of the cab—no, not herself; that wan feeble figure that tried to stand, supported between them, seemed like the ghost of Eva.

I stood irresolute for an instant, looking from one to the other.

"Will you not take her?" asked Mary, with reproachful scorn in her voice; "you see her state."

I moved a step nearer; and Eva, looking at me with wistful beseeching face, tottered forwards and fell into my arms.

CHAPTER LXXI.

EXPLANATIONS.

I CARRIED her up-stairs to her room, her pallid face resting against my shoulder, while Mary and Miss Barton followed, and laid her on the couch. "Now leave us," said Mary, decisively, "and send her maid quickly. I will come down presently," she whispered, as I was leaving the room, "and explain all."

Her confident tone completed the relief of mind which Eva's return in her company had already brought, and I left the room to arouse the servant, and send for the doctor, feeling almost an elation of spirits, Eva's prostrated aspect notwithstanding. Illness seemed for the moment a small matter. In a few minutes the household was astir, the news that its mistress had come back spreading through it at once; and the housekeeper, emerging from her retreat, came bustling to help, and to get rooms ready for the visitors.

In about half an hour Mary descended to the dining-room, where tea was laid, and I awaited

her, impatient for her news, striving to appear calm.

"Take some refreshment, Mary, before you speak; I can wait now, for the story is half told already; it is almost enough to know that my horrid fears are not realised."

"You men are selfish creatures," she began, coming up to the fire, and standing opposite me on the hearth. "Here is your wife half killed with fatigue and excitement, and coming back to you because it is her duty, when to my mind it is you who ought to have flown to her, and the first thing you begin to think about is the relief to your own feelings."

I admired the young girl's pluck in taking up this line, but I was not yet prepared to accept the position she accorded me, so retorted—

"I admit the justice of your reproaches in great part, Mary; I see that I have misunderstood Eva grievously; still they would, perhaps, come with more propriety if you knew the whole facts."

"I know quite enough to know that you have shamefully ill-treated her."

"That is, you have heard Eva's version of the affair."

"Version, indeed! Ah! Eva is more generous than you, Mr West," said the young girl, proudly.

"Then she has told you that there is something to be forgiven? Pray, consider the state of suspense I am in, Mary, and keep your recriminations, just

though they be, till you have told me what you know. Eva has been down to Leatherby, I see that; but pray tell me how and when you met."

"It was about one o'clock yesterday. I was staying for a day or two with Aunt Emily. We were sitting in the drawing-room, she and I—Miss Honoria was walking in the garden, she had been in her strange ways for a day or two—when the door opened, and Eva came tottering in, looking wild and pale as a ghost, and fell fainting at our feet. It seemed hours before we could bring her round, for she fainted again and again. Even when she got better she could hardly speak, and it was quite late in the afternoon before she told us what had happened."

"Why did you not telegraph to me?"

"We thought at first it must be that something dreadful had happened to yourself, which had turned her mind. We thought of everything but the right cause, and then when we came to learn what it was, we did not like to have it known about the town. I say 'we,' but she would not tell Aunt Emily much, and she only told me afterwards all about it, by bits; how you had been at this ball, and seen her without her knowledge; and how, when she came home, you had met her and reproached her, and made use of an awful word, and treated her as if she were an abandoned creature; and so between fright, and indignation, and shame, she was distracted and quite beside

herself, and so came down by the first train to us. And how she managed it is still a wonder."

"You speak of shame, Mary. Eva was all defiance with me, and yet I could not disbelieve the testimony of my own eyes. Was I then right, and has there really been conduct to produce shame?"

"You could not reproach her more bitterly than she reproached herself. She said that was what made her run away; she felt she could never look you in the face again."

I looked earnestly at Mary, and she went on, speaking in a low voice and with hesitation, her eyes turned to the ground.

"Yes, she knew how wrong she had been; that night especially, she felt that she had been foolish and giddy; those were her words—and then when she found you had been there, and seen her conduct, you would never believe that she had not always been behaving in the same light way."

"Yes," I replied, "and if you had only heard the ribald talk that went on about it; it was this which drove me nearly mad before I ever saw her myself with—with that man. And the people in the room were talking about it as if the affair were notorious already. And after all, a sudden impulse does not explain away public impressions. They must have been formed by something which happened before."

"For shame, Mr West! Would you allow a light slander spoken by any impudent person to weigh

against your wife's word? She assured me solemnly that Colonel Strickland had never ventured on a word that could border on impropriety, even on that evening. She feels remorseful enough at having allowed herself to be led away so far as to have caused even the appearance of wrong."

"There is no smoke without fire," said I, moodily. "Appearances are all we have to judge by. Other people formed their judgment about them plainly enough. And even you admit the appearance of wrong on this occasion?"

"And if there was, what then?" cried Mary, quite fiercely. "Is no fault a woman commits to be venial? Because a young wife once in a way behaves a little thoughtlessly, is she to be railed at, and called bad names, and driven from her house as if she were a thoroughly abandoned woman? Are there no degrees in faults, and have you done your duty so well by your wife that she must be judged by such a lofty standard? Can you make no allowance for a young girl, thrown all by herself, without anything to do, or friends, or sympathy?"

"Sympathy! God knows I at least have had little enough of that."

"That is so like a man," retorted Mary; "everything is to be put on one side of the scale, and nothing on the other. You had business, and occupation, and excitement, and fame, and she was left all day alone and neglected—for she *was* neglected, you

know, whatever the cause; and then because she was not absolutely perfect, you throw all her loving nature and truth and honesty to the winds. Truly men are selfish creatures. They view everything merely as it affects themselves. If your honour is so vastly important, why did you not take a little more care to guard it properly?"

I admired the young girl's chivalrous defence of her friend. It would have been so easy to assume a lofty moral superiority, while yet acting as peace-maker. And I felt keenly under her reproaches the wickedness of my unjust rage. But my mind was not yet laid to rest.


"You speak as if it were merely a question of a thoughtless moment in a ball-room, Mary. But this was merely the last link of a long chain of circumstances thus suddenly revealed, and all pointing in the same direction. Why, you yourself gave me a warning on the subject, before you went away last autumn; although, like a fool, I was too blind then to understand your meaning."

"You would have grossly misunderstood me," she replied haughtily, "if you supposed I meant to throw suspicion on Eva. I will not deny," she added, after a pause, speaking with hesitation and looking downwards, "that I did not think your plan of having a stranger always in the house a good one; but it is one thing to wish to shield your wife from further estrangement, and another to suspect her of even the

shadow of disloyalty. And, ah, Mr. West," the young girl added with fervour, raising her eyes and looking proudly in my face. "if you had seen Eva as I did yesterday, as she lay there barely able to speak, full of her own little faults, yet not uttering a word of reproach for your treatment of her, gasping out her protestations of love and loyalty, laying bare every thought of her truthful mind,—you would understand how ashamed I at any rate feel at having ever allowed a suspicion to enter my mind that she would ever be other than the guileless truthful Eva I knew her to be. And when," continued Mary, wiping away the tears which had come while she was speaking, "I think of her self-abasement, her self-reproaches, because she had come short of her own standard of what was right, her fears lest she should have lost your affection, I declare I feel quite ashamed to be standing here justifying her conduct at all in this cold-hearted fashion."

As her friend spoke up thus on behalf of Eva, my heart leapt up as if shaking off the load that oppressed it, and my previous suspicions seemed to be passing off into the distance, like some horrid grotesque phantom. Yet I went on, expecting perhaps to invite some further avowal in confirmation of my hopes.

"You speak of affection, Mary. It is not a very strong mark of affection in a wife to join with another person in turning her husband into ridicule."



"You mean that business about that wretched drawing?" said Mary, eagerly. "I am glad you mentioned it, for I had forgotten to speak about it. Yes, Eva told me about that too; she was never tired of laying bare her faults and blunders, real and supposed. She told me how she saw you suspected that you had been caricatured, and how she had meant a dozen times to disabuse you of the notion. But what between anger at your supposing her capable of such a thing, and shyness at speaking, she let the opportunity for doing so go by. Yes, this was one of the matters she was most contrite about. She knew, she said, that she was not quick at understanding things, and often vexed you on this account, but she saw quite plainly what had gone wrong in this case. You see, Mr West," continued the speaker, again looking up and confronting me, "I am acting faithfully as Eva's agent, however much it goes against the grain to do so. It is the old story; all confession and supplication on the wife's part, pride and obduracy on the husband's. You have Eva quite at your feet, you see; it rests with you to stoop and raise her up, if you can bring yourself to condescend to do so."

As the young girl said this, with flashing eye and curling lip, although yet, as it struck me, with a sort of consciousness underlying her manner that she was speaking as became an advocate, the sense of personal injury which had possessed me up to this time

passed away, and as I thought of Eva stricken down by my cruelty, yet uttering no complaint of her own sufferings, but speaking only of her share of blame in contributing to this misunderstanding,—as this picture came up before my mind, no reproach of her champion could be severer than my own self-condemnation. And my impulse was to throw myself at her feet, and ask forgiveness for my cruelty. But just then a horrid suspicion came up in my mind, that, after all, perhaps I was being hoodwinked, for that on one important point explanation was still wanting. I stood irresolute, therefore, and said—

“ You spoke just now of a thoughtless moment in a ball-room, Mary, but did Eva also tell you that she allowed that man to accompany her home from the ball? I heard his voice quite plainly below when she entered the house. It was that which drove away all my resolves about forbearance.”

“ Good gracious, Mr West !” exclaimed Mary, “ is it possible you don’t understand the case even now ? She went to the ball and came back with Mrs Strickland. Mrs and Miss Strickland were both in the carriage when they came home, as well as the Colonel.”

“ Say no more,” I cried, thoroughly abashed and humbled. “ You cannot condemn me more than I do myself. I will go and seek her pardon at once.”

Of the next scene I cannot speak at length. Any misgivings remaining lest I might have been too

credulous, would have been at once dispelled by the sight of the wan face, cradled in pillows, looking out beseechingly as I entered the room, while the hollow eyes followed me wistfully as I made my way to her side. What must not the poor child have suffered to change to this in one day ! And as I knelt by her, and, resting her head on my arm, asked her in tender accents to forgive me, and to try to forget that I ever spoke so cruelly, and to trust me that I would never wound her gentle heart again, she sought in vain to find utterance, but a gentle smile came over her face, and holding my hand with her feeble fingers, she tried to draw it to her lips.

A few minutes passed by in fondling her, while I strove by word and look to make her feel that the reconciliation was complete, trying to cheer and satisfy the crushed mind, when her aunt entered the room to announce the arrival of the physician. "I hope the doctor will approve of our having made the journey back," said Miss Barton, rubbing her hands gently together in a nervous manner ; "Mary would have it this was the best thing to do, and Mr Fergusson seemed to approve too : he thought if it was to be made at all it had better be made at once ; and Mary said it would never do for her to remain at Leatherby without you, and that you would never be able to come down with all this business about the dreadful war to look after. But I am sure I don't know whether it was wise ; she seems so very much shaken by it."

To the physician was told so much of the cause of illness as was necessary for him to know. He was one of the foremost men in his profession, and secrets are not to be kept from one's doctor. Mrs West had had a serious quarrel with her husband, and had gone off alone almost straight from a ball to Leatherby—arriving there in the state already described, and returning at night with her aunt and friend. Telling him this I brought him to his patient, with whom he stayed a long time, examining the case as patiently as if no other sick people awaited him. At last he came forth with Miss Barton from the room, and joining me in the library communicated his opinion while writing his prescription. There had been a great shock to the nervous system, and great nervous depression in consequence, acting on a delicate constitution. Complete rest and frequent nourishment were enjoined, but the best remedy was the restoration of happiness. Still there was great vital depression, and great natural delicacy of constitution. The action of the heart was very feeble. This was the great physician's verdict; and hearing it, a dull dread came over me of a possible greater blow impending than that from which we were delivered. Yet, on the whole, a great balance of relief remained since Eva's coming back. There are degrees and kinds of mental pain. Which suffers most—the parent who lays a loved child in the grave, or the one who is dishonoured by the mis-

deeds of a living one? Eva and I were united again, more truly so than at any time before; she had youth, and care, and peace to help her. And as I walked down to the office that morning, I felt that I could once more look my fellow-men in the face, and could once more apply my mind to business.

One task remained to be done, and not an easy one. It was necessary to break off my official connection with Strickland, and to do so without making the reason public. And while now believing entirely that the occasion for scandal had arisen, on one side, from at most the heedlessness which a woman less guileless, or more worldly-wise, would have avoided, I could not bring myself to believe in the same innocence of intention on the other. How far I had been mistaken in my first supposition of deliberate purpose on his part, and how far even in his case his conduct may have been exaggerated by appearance, I shall never know, for it was due to Eva under our reconciliation that even to him I should not say anything which should bear the semblance of imputation on her conduct. While therefore it was necessary to let him understand that the avoidance of scandal required the severance of our connection, no crimination was possible, and it must be left to him to give any explanation for the rupture he might choose, other than the real one. Strickland's reply to my letter left me still more in doubt than before, whether I had not done him injustice. Further explana-

tion was however from the nature of the case impossible, but as the matter stood I hope that our separation was effected with the least possible amount of public attention.

That evening when I returned home the report was entirely good. Eva had slept almost all through the day, which Dr Adams, when he paid his second visit, said was the best thing she could do, and she slept well all night. Next day Miss Barton returned home. I would fain have urged her to stay, but despite her nervous helpless manner it was plain the gentle lady would be firm on this point. She dared not leave her sister, she said. She had never left her alone before during the last twenty years. Honoria might have one of her attacks, and she could never forgive herself if she were away. Dearly though Miss Barton loved her niece, her first idea of duty was plainly connected with her lifelong companion. But Mary was to stay till Eva should be well again, or at any rate well enough to move, and where could better nurse be found?

The days flew swiftly by. We were now busier than ever, if possible, for all the great reorganisation schemes were in full swing, and those concerned with them owed their first duty to their country. A few minutes by Eva's side in the morning before going down to the office, and again half-an-hour or so on returning in the evening, was all the time that could be given to home life. But she seemed now quite

satisfied. She did not talk much during these visits, but would lie quietly, holding my hand, smiling gently as I spoke of the time to come when she would be well and strong again, and the servants of the public who had done the work that was wanted of them would be duly kicked out of office, and we two should be able to go holiday-making together. "A real honeymoon we will have then; and Eva, you shall begin to teach me to dance." At which she almost laughed. I saw hardly more of her constant attendant, who dined early by herself, and spent the evening in Eva's room, sleeping on the couch there, and only resigning her charge in favour of the professional nurse to take an occasional short walk or drive. "Don't have any misgivings about being away," she said. "Eva gets restless now if you are too much at home, for she fancies you ought to be down at the House or at a Cabinet Council. She is quite happy in thinking of your greatness, and feels the reflected splendour which shines on all your surroundings. And oh, Mr West! I hope you have forgiven my boldness on that dreadful day! How I came to speak so to a Secretary of State, I can't think."

"Ah! Mary, in doing so you showed yourself a friend indeed. It is all your doing that Eva and I are now together again. How shall I ever be able to thank you sufficiently for your goodness?"

At last the day drew near for the second reading

of the Army Mobilisation Bill, on which occasion it had been determined by the Cabinet that a statement should be made in the House reviewing all the measures which the Government had carried out for the defence of the country, naval and military, and the general state of our preparations. The Bill would not come on till late, but Mr Carstairs was also to make his part of the statement upon the preparations of the Navy in the afternoon (Mr Carstairs was First Lord of the Admiralty), so that the whole condition of our national defences might be put before the country. The great question of peace or war—firm peace or a war of Titans—still remained suspended in the balance, but the political outlook seemed to be certainly growing less dark, and many of us were almost sanguine that war might be finally averted—averted by the only way possible, by showing that we were not afraid or unprepared to meet it.

There would thus be a long sitting, and I went home from office early in the afternoon, to see my poor invalid before going down to the House.

“Dr Adams thinks she is certainly better to-day,” said Mary, meeting me on the stairs. “He says we must go on giving the food regularly every two hours, but that everything is going well.”

“I can’t see, myself, that anything is going on except the illness. I don’t perceive that she is any stronger from day to day, although I try hard to fancy it.”

"When you see her in the evening she has often got to be tired, and I think all this port-wine she has to take during the day makes her dull. She is very tired of it herself, and Dr Adams has told us to change it for champagne. You will find her brighter now, because it is earlier in the day."

"Poor child!" said I, pausing a while on our way up-stairs. "It must be dull, dull work lying there day after day, even with your nursing, Mary."

"There never was such a patient," replied Mary. "She was saying only just now she should be quite happy to lie there for ever, and never get up again, if you could only sit with her now and then. She should be quite sorry when she got strong again, for she had never felt so happy before, and she meant never to go to balls and amusements of that sort again."

"Sometimes I could almost wish it too," I replied, moodily.

"What *do* you mean?"

"Well, I feel that all this peace and contentment cannot last. Do what I will to hide it, the hard future of reality will force itself up to view, a future only too like the past. Make what good resolutions we may, Mary, they will not stand the strain of daily life. When Eva gets well, the notions born of a sick-bed will give place to more natural feelings. Do what we may, our tastes and habits will be sure to carry us apart—at least, in thought—and then I shall grow bitter, and cut her with harsh words,

and so frighten and estrange her again, poor gentle soul !”

“Not so,” replied Mary, gravely. “After this warning you will be on your guard against such impulses ; Eva, too, for her part——”

“And was I not on my guard before, always making good resolutions about forbearance, and never keeping them ? No, Mary, few tempers are calm enough to bear the constant irritation produced by want of sympathy ; and warnings only take effect for a time. A twelvemonth hence we shall be perhaps just as if all this business had never happened. This is what I dread will happen, and I grow sick at heart at the prospect. But I did not mean to burden you with these gloomy forebodings ; at least let us banish them for the present.” And so saying, I led the way to Eva’s room.

“What is this you have been saying, my pretty one ? You to leave off dancing just as I am going to begin ? That would be indeed a transposition of the proper order of things. But you must make haste and get well, you little thing, if only to satisfy my longing to begin our lessons. You look to me to be better than usual to-day, my darling. Do not you feel so yourself ?”

“Oh yes,” said Eva, trying to speak with liveliness, “you don’t know how strong I am, really ; I believe I could sit up or do anything if I tried. But

it's so nice to be petted, I shall go on shamming ever so long."

"Has Mary told you I am going to be away for ever so long to-night?" I said, after a pause, gulping down the sensation which made it difficult to find words. "My last night of real hard work, and then I shall be able to have a little bout of idleness."

"When do you think you shall be home, Charlie?" she replied, in her low voice, to the face bending down very near her own.

"Why, how can it matter to you, you little thing? You must be asleep, whatever time it is; promise me you won't fidget about it. I should break down altogether in my speechifying if I fancied you were lying awake and restless at home. Besides, I mustn't disturb Mary in the small hours."

"Mary never goes to sleep at all, I think," whispered Eva; "she seems always to be always awake whenever I look up. But I will go to sleep, really, all to-night, only I should like to wake up just for a little bit when you come home."

I promised to knock at the door when I returned, and took my parting kiss, for Eva looked fatigued with talking.

As I did so she whispered, "Mary has promised to read me the speeches to-morrow."

"That will be famous," said I gaily; "better than any of Dr Adams's composing draughts."

"Don't begin to laugh at me again, Charlie," said

Eva, patting my cheek gently as I bent over her pillow, and smiling faintly, yet with a tear glistening in her eye; "don't begin to laugh again at me, or I shall never want to get well at all. You know I'm a foolish little thing, but we can't be different from what we are, can we?"

CHAPTER LXXII.

OUR REFORMER'S CLAIM TO HIS TITLE OBTAINS
RECOGNITION.

It was about ten o'clock when I rose to make my statement in a crowded house, a house already excited by spirited utterances upon the condition of the navy, and in sympathetic mood for receiving my declaration of the state of the army. The Army Mobilisation Bill invested the Government with certain powers for calling out the Reserves, for equipping the forces, for employing the railways, and for occupying certain lands required for defence, all in the event of war being imminent, but in anticipation of any actual declaration; but the object of my speech was not only to explain exactly what was contemplated by the act of Mobilisation, but also what was the nature of our new organisation, and what the state of our preparations for defence. For although all these points had been thoroughly discussed and determined on, the whole scheme had not till now been made formally public in a comprehensive form.

The principle, I said, on which her Majesty's Government had acted in their measures could be expressed in a few words. Modern war was sudden, short, and decisive; and if one fact had been established more clearly than another, it was that no wealth of natural resources or productive power would make up for lack of preparation beforehand. England, if she would not exist upon sufferance, must be prepared as well as other nations. Some people might say, and had said, that our insular position gave us immunity from the dangers which impended over any unarmed nation on the Continent, and undoubtedly it did greatly lessen them; but absolute certainty of safety it could not give us; and was it to be tolerated for a moment that the honour and liberties of our free and happy country should be jeopardised by risking their safety on a chance? Is such a reckless policy as that to be recommended to a sober practical people? And after all, the sacrifice called for to obtain this certainty is not such a great one. If our position is not absolutely safe, it is at any rate much safer than that of any other country, and our scale of defence may be diminished in proportion. Further, in proportion as we are secure does the danger of war diminish. The security of England is the best guarantee for the general peace of Europe. And while the sacrifice is not a large one absolutely, compared with the object to be attained it is in

reality almost insignificant. For we have not proposed a large standing army ; that is to be no larger than before. Nor have our reserves been actually much increased ; the expenditure has been mainly of forethought and diligence by those intrusted with the superintendence of the national affairs. Up to this time we have acted in our military organisation as a man might do, who, intending to erect a house, were to provide the bricks, the timber, the lime, and all the other materials requisite, even down to the paperhangings and the door handles, but omitted to prepare a plan of the building, or to give anybody any instructions how the various articles were to be employed. Our work therefore consists in this, that we have framed a symmetrical design for the due employment of the various military materials ready to our hand, while we have also made good a deficiency in the quantity of bricks needed, our original builder having forgotten to provide any foundation for his house. The foundation on which our military structure will rest securely, is the new system of Reserves which we have established ; for the rest, the edifice will be built up of the materials already abundantly available, if only made proper use of. Our reform has therefore been of a twofold kind ; we have provided the army for the first time with a really effective Reserve ; while as for the army itself, instead of a mere congeries of inorganised military units, with nothing prearranged for bringing

them together in war time as a fighting body, but all the higher organisation left to chance, we have now a homogeneous force with all parts duly fitted together, and everything planned beforehand to render it a complete and effective machine. As soon as this bill shall be passed, then, on the word being given for Mobilisation, two hundred thousand men, who are pursuing their avocations as peaceful citizens, thereupon spring to arms, and fall into their destined places in the general scheme of military organisation. For this is the first great point, that the embodied peace army is not to be enlarged; the number of men doomed to enforced idleness in peace time, withdrawn from productive occupations, is no greater than heretofore; our army is to be brought up to war strength by a reserve of a new kind, of men who, after undergoing a sufficiency of training, are thereon relegated to civil life, and are henceforth bound to serve only in war time. In fact, we do now what has always had to be done before in case of war,—engage more recruits; only with this difference, that we *engage them beforehand*, and in sufficient instead of insufficient numbers. For to go to war with small armies is mere wasteful folly.

Next, our scheme is based on the principle of a widely-extended decentralisation, under which also all the needful parts of the machine shall be provided beforehand, nothing being left to chance, or to be taken in hand when war actually breaks out.

And while we cannot imitate the German system of complete localisation, where the same troops are always stationed in the same province, we have provided a plan which secures the essential objects of localisation, while adapted also to the special conditions which are involved in colonial service. First, there has been the amalgamation of the Line with the Militia. A regiment of infantry—the establishment of these having been reduced from 108 to 74 in number—besides furnishing a battalion for foreign service, now consists of an active and a depot battalion serving at home, each of which can be brought up from the Reserves to 900 strong; together with two militia battalions of the same strength, or four battalions in all. Thus every infantry regiment can take the field 2700 strong, besides leaving 900 men at home from which to fill up casualties. Of these component parts of the regiment, the depot line battalion and the two militia battalions will be completely localised with the regimental headquarters, but the various active battalions serving at home will be distributed during peace time in nine Military Divisions, organised in twenty-six, or with the Guards, in twenty-seven brigades. Here appears the second main feature of our scheme. The organisation of these Military Divisions, which replace the irregular and ill-arranged military districts heretofore maintained, will be uniform and permanent, and they will be complete as to generals, staff, guns, stores,

and equipment of all kinds sufficient for a war establishment. And although each Military Division will thus be made up in peace time, as regards troops, of its eight or nine separate line battalions, moving about from one station to another in ordinary course of relief, and will therefore be undergoing constant change of its component elements, its composition for war purposes will consist of a definite number of complete infantry regiments, designated beforehand, and permanently allotted to it. Thus, in fact, every regiment has a specified headquarters for time of peace and a specified headquarters for time of war ; and on Mobilisation being declared, all that it has to do is to call up its reserves and march away from the one to the other, where it finds its generals, staff, equipment, and all things needful for taking the field. When this is done, each Military Division, which during peace time is a mere skeleton force of eight or nine weak battalions, becomes a complete and self-contained army of 30,000 men.

The headquarters of these nine Military Divisions have been established at Aldershot, Colchester, Cork, the Curragh, Dover, Dublin, Portsmouth, Woolwich, and York ; and at these places accordingly the nine armies will assemble on mobilisation being decreed, from which to proceed abroad, or to co-operate in the defence of the country. While for purposes of transport, a large number of horses have been made available within the jurisdiction of each military division,


engaged for a small annual fee during peace time—constituting in effect an insurance premium—to be placed at the disposal of the army on mobilisation.

But it is not enough to organise an army of men ; officers are needed to command the levies which we have provided, and skilled officers, because the troops will be unskilled. The officers for the reserve or militia battalions are therefore to come from the line. In this way the militia will obtain that cohesion and real amalgamation with the active line battalions which young troops need. But the number of officers that could reasonably be kept up in peace time would be insufficient in war. To meet this difficulty the system of provisional commissions has been introduced, by which a number of young members of volunteer corps, on undergoing certain professional tests, stand posted to each regiment as provisional subalterns. On mobilisation being proclaimed, these commissions become *de facto* permanent, and the holders of them in all respects *bona fide* officers. Meanwhile, during peace time, these officers receive no pay, and a provisional commission has force for only seven years, after which the holder is succeeded by a younger man.

The same plan is in course of application to the artillery and cavalry. It may appear more open to objection in their case, but any sudden change from a peace to a war footing necessarily involves the appointment of young officers who must be more or

less untrained, unless, indeed, a full war establishment of officers be kept up in peace time, which is not to be thought of. After all, although scientific acquirements are very desirable for a portion of your artillery, you don't want the whole of your officers to be scientific; experience in war is much the more valuable quality of the two. We estimate, and rightly, the value of camps of instruction; but what are the lessons to be gained by a week or two spent in such camps, compared with what may be furnished in a single campaign?

But further, a congeries of divisions or army corps, however complete and well appointed, do not make an army. Our nine Army Divisions, if employed in the field, will make up a force which, for tactical purposes, ought to be formed into at least three armies, and for these there must be generals-in-chief and headquarter staffs. But here again a peace establishment is not needed nor desirable. There is no room for three commanders-in-chief with their separate staffs in peace time to command our 80,000 embodied troops, nor would such an expense be justifiable. We provide for the emergency accordingly by provisional commissions. Three of the major-generals now commanding divisions have therefore received provisional commissions as generals of armies, their places as division commanders being filled up in like manner by provisional commissions issued to as many generals of brigades, and so on



with the junior grades; and a similar arrangement has been carried out with respect to the staff. On the word being given for Mobilisation, all these officers will move up to the higher posts assigned them. And while in this way nothing is left unprovided for, the plan offers two great advantages. The country has the means of scrutinising the appointments to be made, and can satisfy itself beforehand that proper men will be selected to lead its armies, and that the measures taken to make those armies efficient in other respects will not be stultified by jobbery, or ransacking the half-pay list at the last moment to drag out some worn-out old men to fill posts they are unfit for. On the other hand, the men designated for these high functions will prepare themselves in peace time to prove equal to the occasion, should it arise. In short, when our army is called out, and raised from ninety to three hundred thousand men, no one, from the generals in chief to the youngest provisional lieutenant, will be taken by surprise.

All this, be it observed, costs the country nothing; it merely involves care and forethought on the part of those intrusted with the administration of the army.

Various other measures have to be mentioned, which, although of minor degree compared with the great one of creating an efficient and sufficient force, have yet an important share in the general scheme.

The antiquated and excessive unattached list

known as the establishment of general officers has been abolished ; general officers will, in future, be appointed like all other officers by selection, and the establishment will be limited to the men who are actually exercising, or who have actually exercised, the duties signified by the title. To become a brigade-general a man must actually be appointed to command a brigade, or to an office on the staff of corresponding importance. To become a major-general he must command a division.

So with respect to the colonels. This rank can in future only be obtained by appointment to the command of a regiment, or equivalent staff appointment. In fact, the whole system hitherto in force of promoting the senior officers of the army, with its brevets and qualifying periods of service, and bringing them in and out of the half-pay lists, and piling up the higher grades out of all proportion to the wants of the service, is as much out of keeping with the conditions of modern times as the still more preposterous state of things which it succeeded, when field officers might attain that rank before leaving the nursery.

Honorary rank and honorary promotions have been prospectively abolished. Military titles will signify henceforward that the holders of them are really what they are called.

This reform involved an extensive one of the Indian army, where the abuse of military titles has been car-

ried to a prodigious length. Orders have accordingly been sent out to India abolishing the Indian Staff Corps. The military men now employed as civilians have been invited to join a new Civil Service, a somewhat higher rate of pension being offered as compensation for loss of title. Those really employed as soldiers have been recast into regiments, so that rank and duties may go together, and the country be no longer flooded with field officers and nominal generals for whom no employment can be found.

Relative rank has been readjusted. The fact is, one civil branch of the army after another has gained concessions through clamour and agitation, till the combatant officers have been degraded to the lowest place. This state of things may have had some show of justification in the days when military education began and ended with a little drill, but the education of the combatant officers is now at least as scientific as that of the so-called scientific departments, and the matter was one urgently inviting reform.

In place of an establishment of field artillery quite insufficient in strength, but maintained on an expensive war footing, the number of batteries has been largely increased, the embodied peace establishment of each being largely reduced.

The artillery regiment had reached an unwieldy size. It has now been broken up into nine manageable bodies, one attached to each military division.

Among other advantages claimed for this change, it admits of free selections for promotion, and widens the door for the advancement of merit.

So much for the army itself. As regards its administration, the leading change has been to reconstitute the office of Commander-in-chief, detaching him from the War Office, and establishing his specific responsibility for the performance of his duties. All the civil departments have been dealt with in the same way. Their heads are no longer the irresponsible advisers of the Secretary of State, sheltering themselves against all obloquy behind his name, and exercising a backstairs influence which no one could gauge. There will now be a definite record of the course of business, and if anything goes wrong let Parliament call for the papers, when it will be seen exactly who is to blame; what advice the executive department concerned gave to the Secretary of State, and his reasons for not acting upon it, if he did not do so. In this way only can responsibility be properly established, and efficient executive administration secured. With all this we believe that the control of both the Minister and Parliament over the army will be far more real and effective than it has ever been hitherto.

In face of possible combinations, the speaker continued, it seemed madness to concentrate all our military stores in one place, and that on what is practically the coast. It is nothing to say that this

arsenal, selected in the first instance by chance, and which has gradually attained its present enormous development, is reasonably secure. We have no right to commit the incredible folly of running any risk whatever of the awful calamity involved in the destruction of our only military arsenal. Even if there were no risk, we have no right to hold out the temptation to other nations to attempt rash enterprises by leaving any vulnerable spot in our armour. Nor is any heroic remedy needed. We do not mean to abandon Woolwich; we have simply carried out the precautionary measure so often talked about, of establishing a supplementary magazine in the centre of the country.

Still more strongly did the same considerations impel us to carry out another measure, the defence of London. The invasion of England has been a fertile subject of discussion of late years, here as well as abroad. Some people think the notion wildly absurd; others, and by no means the worst judges, think that, under a not very improbable combination of circumstances, it would have had, before our present efforts, a reasonable chance of success. However that may be, and I will not now enter into the argument one way or the other, this much at least is certain, that nations are not always deterred from enterprises in war by their rashness. France, as we now know, had no chance of success against Germany, but that did not preserve her from rushing to

arms, and the awful calamity which followed. Whatever the difficulty or danger might be, no other plan offers the same results, if it succeed, as a blow at the enemy's centre, and no prize in the world is so tempting as London. At any rate, it seems to Her Majesty's Government perfectly intolerable that the question should be ever discussed whether the invasion of England is possible or not possible, when by the most simple precautions the matter may be placed beyond the range of probabilities—the attempt made too hopeless even to be thought about. Further, whether there shall be war or peace is yet beyond our power of foresight, but we believe that to render England impregnable is at least to offer one more chance in favour of a peaceful issue out of the present ominous condition of Europe. In the interest of peace, then, we are carrying out the scheme which in a few weeks will, for the first time, render panics groundless. England, if she goes to war on the Continent, must take her chance with other nations, but war within our own shores will henceforth be impossible. Nor is it a great thing to accomplish; the whole affair will be carried out for less than what may be lost by a fall of two per cent in the national funds.

One point more. It is of no use to build up a great and carefully planned organisation for providing an army, cheap as well as efficient, with all the parts framed in proportions suitable to each other

and the whole, if pieces of the framework are constantly to be picked out here and there, till the whole machine becomes again rickety and unstable, overloaded in one part, too weak in another. If senseless lopping off or adding to the establishment of the army, such as has heretofore been customary, is still to be always going on, in accordance with that often irrational impulse known as public opinion, and at the fancy of the Government of the day or Parliament—if this practice is to continue, there will soon be an end of economy. The number of men embodied may perhaps be allowed to vary within narrow limits, but if the organisation now provided is to hold good, the available establishment must remain fixed. The time has passed when the annual voting of the forces as a guarantee for liberty has ceased to be anything but a fiction. Permanence and economy go hand in hand. We seek to secure this object in the ‘Army Establishment Bill’ which my right honourable friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, will ask leave to bring in this night, and by which, if it shall eventually be approved by this House, the strength of the army will be permanently fixed by Act of Parliament. If circumstances arise hereafter to render an alteration of the establishment proper, then let it be altered accordingly by Act of Parliament; but meanwhile it will be safe from the mischievous effect of those constant fluctuations in strength, unsupported in most cases by any reason,

which are equally fatal to the interests of true economy and true efficiency.

"For," I went on to say, "changes and reductions of the army can and should no doubt be made hereafter ; and this is one special merit which we claim for our scheme, that, for the first time, it offers a plan by which large economy in the charges for our embodied army will be compatible with safety. Our scheme contains a new principle, which, if it proves successful in practice, will admit, we believe, of extraordinary further development ; that, namely, of holding a part of both officers and men engaged for military service only in time of war. At first, while the measure is experimental, and in face of existing European complications, we must proceed with caution ; but when in the light of further experience the principle has become familiar to the country, it should be capable of producing an extraordinary economy in our military expenditure. At present a hundred thousand embodied soldiers are not an excessive nucleus round which the reserve forces have to rally. But no rational person can help regretting the waste of power and life involved in withdrawing so large a part of the manhood of the nation from the useful employments of civil life ; and I, for one, look forward to the day when by maintaining and developing still further the principle of trained reserves, disembodied in peace time, and resting upon a sound and complete organisation

administered by a highly-trained staff, the regular embodied forces in the kingdom may be brought within smaller dimensions than they have measured at any time within this century. In this way, then, we claim to have produced a true financial as well as true military reform.

“This completes the summary of our measures : it is for the country and Parliament to decide how far they are suitable for the object in view. We have no bloated armaments to show, no great additional expenditure to ask sanction for. The increase in the military estimates is mainly for the disembodied pay, or retaining fee, to be paid to the reserve and militia. There will not, we believe, be found many to say that the cost is excessive for the object in view. Some, indeed, may think we have not gone far enough ; that we should not trust to voluntary service ; that every man should be required to perform the first duty incumbent on a citizen—to take part in the defence of his country. Sir, irrefutable though that argument may be logically, Her Majesty’s Government feel that, in a time like the present, when the people of England are called on to present a united front towards the dangers which threaten her ; when all men’s hearts should beat in harmony together ;—that in such a time we should do wisely to avoid any course which might create even a partial division in the sentiments of the nation. We believe that the plan we have adopted will be more gener-

ally in unison with the feeling of our countrymen, as furnishing adequate means of defence without interfering with that liberty which is the cherished birth-right of us all ; that, if not logically defensible, it will yet be heartily accepted as a reasonable, practicable scheme, suited to the state of things with which we have to deal ; and that, although the maintenance of a great volunteer army, supported by the tax-paying community, places an undue burden on the latter, while a large number of able-bodied men escape altogether, yet that the prosperous citizens of this rich community will not grudge the cost of a measure which serves to bind the nation in one united front against the would-be disturbers of the peace of Europe, and violators of the liberty of neutrals."

Never was a speech better received. One or two men got up, as if to criticise, with the seeming intention of making a debate ; but the House was impatient and excited ; and on Mr Braham rising to point out the urgency of the case, and that notwithstanding the brighter aspect which foreign affairs were now wearing, yet that Mobilisation might have to be declared even next day ; that the principles set forth in the bill had virtually been already placed before the House and country in the various measures publicly carried out by the Government during the past few months, in pursuance of the powers accorded them by the votes already given for men and

money; and that the speech of the Secretary for War, in fact, merely summarised what had already been made public in one form or another; that these measures had, beyond doubt, been approved by the general voice of the country; and that, with the enemy almost at our gates, this was no time to be discussing details of military organisation—on Mr Braham addressing it briefly to this effect, the House, taking the cue, insisted on the question being put at once, and the second reading was carried without a debate or division. Thereon, standing orders being suspended, the Bill was committed at once, and we went through the clauses in slashing style. No chance given for ventilating small hobbies. One or two men, indeed, pleaded for time, and were for still maintaining the inefficiency of the militia, and for saving the good old plan of seniority generals; but no patience was shown for the champions of antiquated abuses; and by two o'clock the Bill was brought up for a third reading, and passed amid loud and triumphant cheers.

Then up rose Mr Merrifield, in an excited House, to move for leave to bring in the Army Establishment Bill, which fixed the strength of our military forces—a Bill which, he explained, although not demanding the same urgency as that just passed, yet it behoved the House to use all reasonable despatch in dealing with.


Mr Merrifield was now more popular than ever,

both with the House and with the country. His self-abnegation in taking subordinate office had been much admired ; his high-toned utterances still more so ; in fact, his eloquent appeals to the patriotism of the country, his stirring enunciations of the duty of strong nations to the weak, and of the need for England's becoming the exemplar of that higher morality, which does not limit its action within the artificial boundary of common blood or language ; these lofty sentiments, clothed in the noble form which only his eloquence could impart to them, and impressed upon the public with indefatigable force and energy on every possible occasion, had inspired the whole nation with his own steadfast spirit ; and he stood forth now more conspicuous than ever among men, higher than ever in national regard. When, therefore, Mr Merrifield said that the Bill which had just been passed was defective, in his opinion, only because it did not go far enough, those who would have opposed it on the score of its sweeping character were left stranded by the tide of public opinion passing beyond them.

"I am free to confess," said the orator, "that in my poor judgment the assumption involved in the Bill, that the citizens of a free state like ours, while all in their several degrees liable for their share of the various obligations implied in the condition of citizenship, should yet be absolved from the highest and most important of all obligations—the call to

bear arms in defence of their country—such a narrow view of the duties of citizenship appears, to my humble apprehension, perfectly indefensible on any grounds of morals or justice; that any man should not only deny the duty, but should desire to evade it, is a supposition almost too monstrous for the mind to conceive. Our Bill must therefore be regarded, as my right honourable friend has put it, in the light of a compromise of sense and justice with expediency." Then as the orator passed on to dilate on my services, saying that while the last speaker had represented the measures taken for meeting this great national emergency as measures carried out by the Government collectively, they had, in fact, been mainly devised and carried into effect by the Minister for War; and as he went on to congratulate the Government and the country on their good fortune in having secured the services of a man who had shown himself so fit as his right honourable friend to deal with the circumstances which had arisen, with other encomiums in the same strain, while the House by its plaudits echoed the flattering tale,—I felt for the moment the true happiness conferred by the sense of good service to one's country done and recognised. Seldom can there be realised such fruition of a patriot statesman's aspirations as fell to my lot on this occasion. Parliamentary triumphs are for the most part won grudgingly from political adversaries—nor can it often be given to one Minister

to be praised by another. But at this juncture the opposition party in matters of military policy had ceased to exist, while the difference in age and standing between Mr Merrifield and myself put his testimony on a quite different category from the ordinary compliment of minister to minister. This then was a supreme moment in my life ; and as I left the House, elated by the congratulations of friends, and with the cheers which greeted me when we broke up still ringing in my ears—rising above the proud satisfaction at the good work done and recognised, I felt all the exaltation which could not but be occasioned by the personal gratification these tributes occasioned. True it was that I had reached the summit of reputation, and that the rest of my political career must needs be one of decline. Even if the fall were not to be as rapid as the rise, a fall it still must be. This generous suspension for the moment of all opposition could not be maintained much longer ; to no man could it be given always to reign undisputed as a dictator, every action endorsed and applauded by the nation ; henceforward political life must mean for me, as for others, the ordinary humdrum of modern public life ; great efforts and small measures ; drudgery, commonplace, and disappointment. But the great object now before me once accomplished ; the country once established in security ; I felt that I could freely relinquish all share of further prosperity and fame.




CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE LAST.

A CROWD of members were leaving the House, some rousing their weary servants, dozing uneasily on coach boxes in the morning light, others pursuing their way home on foot in little groups, discussing in high notes the proceedings of the night; and one or two of my colleagues made way for me on the pavement, as if suggesting to me to join their party; but evading the invitation, I made off in another direction, and sought the way homeward by an unfrequented street. I wanted to walk down in solitude, before reaching my destination, the exaltation of feeling which possessed me. The exercise and quiet quickly had this effect, and I soon found myself changing the rapid step with which I had left the House for a leisurely saunter. The time and scene were inducive to a quiet state of mind. There is something in the solemn stillness of London in the early morning as soothing in its way as the quiet beauty of a country landscape. And as I passed

along the streets, I was reminded by the silence and the coming light that it was just on such a morning as this that my poor Eva came home from her flight. How many days ago ! and yet it seems but yesterday, so quickly have the hours sped in this busy turmoil of high-pressure public life. Quickly for me, but ah ! how long for you, my poor child, lying there helpless on your sick-bed ! All this night, too, I have never given you a thought, and you, perhaps, have been watching all through the long hours, waiting for my coming ! How eagerly the loving heart spoke out when we parted last night, even though the languid voice was weak ! Weak, indeed ! so long she has been ill, and so little sign is there of rallying. And as I looked back on the days gone by, and recalled how little change there had been for the better, a sudden feeling of depression and dread arose within me. What if these are to be the hours to look back upon in after life, when we seek to map out on our memory the record of each moment, dwelling on each word spoken, treasuring up each little incident that marked the time ! Moments indeed, they have been scarcely minutes, the short, hurried snatches of stolen leisure passed by my poor darling's side, while I have been selfishly accepting her patient assurance of contentment with these fleeting visits as an excuse for my neglect. For neglect it has been. What if I can never now repair it ? But no ; I will not listen to this horrid doubt. Surely the chapter of our joint



lives cannot be yet completed. Ah, no! now is close at hand the happy future; rest and mutual happiness await us, while I seek—not to regain my love's heart, that has been freely given already, but to assure her of the warmth of my own; to give her confidence, and drive away her self-abasement and distrust. Surely with one so gentle and so loving, a scheme of life may yet be framed to satisfy the wants of both. Yes, too plainly with reflection come up the outspakings of conscience, bitter at feeding on the memory of a misused past. But the future is still before us; we will live down the sad past in a happier and wiser future.

I was recalled from this vein of musing by noticing from the litter strewed on the road that I was nearing home. There still shines the light dimly in my darling's chamber, emblem can it be of hope and happiness?

Letting myself into the house noiselessly, I passed up the stairs and knocked gently at the door of Eva's room. It was opened immediately. The faithful watcher was up and dressed, a shawl thrown over her shoulders. She raised her hand in sign of caution.

"Eva sleeps, then; but why, Mary, are you sitting up?" I whispered. "What is it?" I asked, for a glance at her face showed that something was amiss.

"Oh! Mr. West," said Mary, in a low voice,

tremulous and anxious, "I don't know what to think. She has been sleeping all the night through, but not as she used to do. She seemed so much brighter all day, and the doctor was quite pleased when he came in the afternoon. I think the sickness has tried her very much."

"What sickness?" I asked hurriedly.


"It was just after Dr Adams left. She was very sick for a long time, and then she fell asleep, and has lain just like this ever since. I think it is this change in the wine which has upset her so."

As Mary spoke she held the shaded candle over the patient. The pale face lay calm, and the pretty brown hair, which Mary herself always dressed daily, tied up with a snood of blue ribbon, was smooth and unruffled about the temples, the rippling locks lying even on the pillow, telling us plainly that the sufferer had never moved her head: but the slow, laboured breathing seemed to shake her whole frame.

"The sickness comes from the brain, sir, I fear, not from the food," said in a low voice the nurse, who had come into the room, and was standing behind us.

Bidding her send to call the doctor as soon as possible, I stood with Mary watching the pale face and laboured breathing.

Presently the blue eyes opened and gazed dreamily at us, as not knowing what they saw. Then with a



sudden look of recognition Eva smiled, and made a motion as if trying to hold out her arms.

I stooped down and encircled her gently in mine. As I did so, with a sudden effort of strength she put one hand round my neck, and nestling her head on my shoulder fell asleep again, her hand dropping back till it rested in mine.

I sat down by the bed, still supporting my burden, to await the doctor's arrival, insisting that Mary should go into the next room and lie down, for she looked worn out with watching.

The time passed on. The fire went out, the broad daylight, coming through even the closed windows, paled the night-lamp.

Eva slept quietly, her head resting on my shoulder, her hand folded in mine; while I, watching the regular but laboured breathing, and looking down on the pale and tranquil face, have space to conjure up the scenes that I and my gentle mate have passed through together. But three short years since she left her home, bright and happy, trustful of me and the future, to share my fortunes. How much has happened in that short time,—fame, reputation, and success achieved, such as never fell to politician's lot before; but what has all this done for her? A more humble lot perchance might have saved my poor crushed darling from this blight. Is this to be the ending of my prosperity.

Then as I sat there, counting the minutes till the

doctor should come, yet dreading to hear his verdict, my thoughts involuntarily wandered away to the exciting hours of the past evening; my speech, and the cheers that greeted it; and Mr Merrifield's; and the tumultuous applause which followed. It was always so, I reflected with shame, as my senses returned to the scene before me; even in my thoughts I seemed always to be leading two separate lives.

The time wore on. Eva still slept peacefully, and, overborne by the silence, and by fatigue and want of rest, I was myself dozing, when suddenly awakened by a movement of the burden in my arms—a sudden drooping of the head, a sudden stop of the laboured breath.

“Mary! Mary! come quickly!”

Too late! Before her faithful friend could come to our side, my gentle Eva had breathed away her life in my arms.

In a peaceful corner of the little cemetery at Leatherby, shaded by graceful boughs, and looking out over the dark woods which clothe the banks of Ewe, a new-placed cross records that beneath it lie the remains of Eva, wife of the Right Honourable Charles West, M.P., with the age, twenty-two years, and the date of her death. Thus ends the first episode of my life. Shall I say that, while recalling fondly the sweet wistful face, the gentle voice, the pretty ways of the innocent young girl, the record of whose brief pilgrimage has been written in these

pages, while thinking with many an unbidden flush of shame of the bitter words—words which no shame can recall, that threw what sadness lay in her path; above all, while calling up with anguish of heart the cruel harshness of that fatal quarrel; while the memory dwells on the sweetness of the poor sufferer in her illness, I know, and hate myself for knowing, that this grief will not be lasting. Each day already makes the wound less tender; how long will it be before the scar alone remains? Already I find, not without self-scorn, unbidden coming up new plans in search of happiness. The past stands fixed, while we, the living, are ever changing as time bears us onward; and in my mind's eye I can already see my second self, lonely perhaps, and hard, and absorbed in public life, looking back on this distant episode of my life, as a brief and almost unsubstantial dream.

THE END.

